

ASPECTS OF CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

W. MAJOR SCOTT, M.A.

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To my brother Maeter,
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ASPECTS OF
CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM



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ASPECTS OF CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

BY THE REV.
W. MAJOR SCOTT, M.A.

I will go unto the altar of God

BOOK OF PSALMS

The Mystery of Union with the Son of God

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TO
MY FATHER
AND
MY MOTHER

PREFACE

THE studies of Christian mystics here presented do not profess to be, in any sense, summaries of their teaching; they are statements, partly expository, of certain aspects or elements of mystical truth. If, to any reader, they should serve as an introduction to that vast and fascinating field of study—Christian mysticism—they will have achieved their purpose.

For the awakening, the sustaining, and the deepening of the spiritual life in the soul of man, perhaps no study, if it be undertaken with humility, is more fruitful than a patient reading of the great Christian mystics. Of such, this little volume may claim to be, not untruly, an outcome. As far as possible, I have endeavoured to use the *ipsissima verba* of the mystics themselves.

My indebtedness to many writers is great. Despite its unsatisfactory character and unsympathetic tone, Vaughan's *Hours with the Mystics* is still, in many ways, indispensable. I have constantly consulted the "Bampton Lectures" on *Christian Mysticism*, as well as other books by Dr. Inge, with whose attitude towards the subject, I am, however, only imperfectly in sympathy, but to whom my gratitude is nevertheless sincere. In one or two instances I have quoted his translations. The writings of the late Rev. J. M. Neale, D.D., I have found ever suggestive; and among other writers whose work has laid me under a lasting obligation, it is a pleasure to name Mrs. Frances A. Bevan, Mr. A. E. Waite, the Rev. C. Bigg, D.D., the Rev. W. Robertson Nicoll, LL.D., the Rev. Alexander Whyte, D.D., and Mr. J. Rendel Harris, Litt.D. I have endeavoured to acknowledge points of special indebtedness—if any have been inadvertently overlooked, I ask forgiveness.

From my wife I have received much help

throughout, but especially in the chapter on St. Teresa. My friend, the Rev. G. Currie Martin, B.D., whose counsel and aid, in the midst of his professorial duties, have been generously given me, added to his many kindnesses by reading and criticizing certain chapters of the book, and to him I tender my best thanks.

W. MAJOR SCOTT.

LISCARD,

1907.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. CONCERNING MYSTICS AND MYSTICISM	I
II. ST. PAUL AND ST. JOHN	14
III. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA	26
IV. DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE	41
V. MASTER ECKHART	53
VI. RUYSBROECK	67
VII. SUSO	81
VIII. TAULER	95
IX. ST. TERESA	108
X. ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS	122
XI. JACOB BEHMEN	132
XII. PETER STERRY	146

ASPECTS OF CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

CHAPTER I

CONCERNING MYSTICS AND MYSTICISM

IT has been said with much truth that mysticism is a word of evil sound in English ears, and it may even be affirmed, not untruly, that mystics are invariably regarded by the multitude with something like suspicion. Yet in a certain dim sense it is as true to say that all men are mystics as it is to say that all men are religious, for many are mystics after an unconscious manner—albeit, by them, the mystic realities are touched rather than grasped. Perhaps the “vocation to the inward life” is not for all.

To give a definition of mysticism is at once fatally easy and exceedingly difficult, for it has been made to denote phenomena so diverse as crude supernaturalism on the one hand, and visions and revelations of the divine on the

2 CONCERNING MYSTICS AND MYSTICISM

other. The simplest definition, however, will probably be found to be the truest as well as the most illuminating. We say, then, frankly that mysticism is the science of spiritual mysteries, and the mystic is one who is concerned with and who believes in spiritual mysteries.

One of the commonest, and, it may be added, one of the falsest of popular errors, is to suppose that a mystery is necessarily something unfathomable. A mystery is rather something unrevealed, though not unrevealable. It is something hidden and obscure only to the uninitiated. It is ever a secret, but to the initiated it is an open one. The secret of the mystic may be, speaking strictly, indefinable, but it is also, speaking strictly, indisputable. One of our most brilliant men of letters has recently called attention to the fact that "much of our modern difficulty, in religion and other things, arises merely from this: that we confuse the word indefinable with the word vague. If some one speaks of a spiritual fact as indefinable we promptly picture something misty, a cloud with indeterminate edges." The same writer goes on to affirm that it is just the indefinable that is the indisputable, and that there are some people to whom spiritual

things have a fierce and practical proximity—to whom God is too actual to be defined. Thus there are many truths which may be rightly apprehended, though they cannot be made wholly transparent.

The mystic recognises and holds "that far removed from ordinary paths and interests, even in the order of the soul, there is a grand experiment possible, and that some have achieved it."¹ This experiment is a spiritual process which demonstrates the possibility in this present life and in this body of humiliation of knowing God. By means of this spiritual operation the mystic can accomplish a "reversion to the fontal source of souls," and enter "into an ecstatic communion with the universal consciousness."

It is, however, untrue to say, as some critics of mysticism have said, that the ambition of the mystic has always been to transcend individuality and morality alike, or that the mystic has always striven to reach the consciousness of God through the negation of self-consciousness. Rather it would be more accurate to say that the mystic seeks to attain a fuller knowledge of God, through a deeper reading of the

¹ A. E. Waite, *A Book of Mystery and Vision*, p. x.

4 CONCERNING MYSTICS AND MYSTICISM
fact of self-consciousness. It was R. L. Nettleship who finely observed that "true mysticism is the consciousness that everything we experience is an element, and only an element in fact—*i.e.* that in being what it is, it is symbolic of something more."¹ Benjamin Jowett, who presents certain interesting affinities with the mystics, writes in his introduction to Plato's *Phædrus*: "By mysticism we mean not the extravagance of an erring fancy, but the concentration of reason in feeling, the enthusiastic love of the good, the true, the one, the sense of the infinity of knowledge and of the marvel of the human faculties."

The mystic proper, however, is "a man who knows that there is only one character of true excellence in human life, and that is the seal or character which expresses the sanction of eternity"; or, as Lasson phrases it, "mysticism views everything from the standpoint of teleology." The mystic always regards life *sub specie æternitatis*. He thus escapes the thralldom of sense and the bondage of mere words. Rigorously cutting off temporal correspondences with things on the earth and turning resolutely from

¹ R. L. Nettleship, *Remains*.

lower creations, the mystic establishes eternal correspondences with things unseen, and steadfastly looks for "the Blessed Isles of the Elect Children" and the "Glory of the Rosy Cross." He undergoes a spiritual education, conducted in the main by means of type and symbol, for it is an axiom of mysticism that all things possess an interior and divine meaning. It is this meaning which the mystic waits to know.

The vital things are the eternal and the unseen things. The mystical or sacramental view of life may be traced throughout the history of mystical thought; although, as Dr. Bigg has pointed out, "there is properly speaking no history of the mystics; only biographies. They are like a chain of stars, each separated from the other by a gulf. We can trace resemblances, even connections; but they themselves tell us that the light comes direct from the sun, and is not passed on at all. Yet the mystic usually reads books, and the beacon of Dionysius, or Joachim, or Tauler wakes the kindred soul across seas or centuries." Thus the wind bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the voice thereof, but know not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth. This is true of every one

6 CONCERNING MYSTICS AND MYSTICISM
that is born of the Spirit. It is only men like Blake who, having felt the breath of the Spirit, ever discern God's forehead at the window, or, like Elias, are caught up to God.

When we speak of Christian mysticism we understand that process of initiation into fuller and deeper knowledge of divine things by which the spirit of man is led towards ultimate union with God. Therein the soul traverses a path which the vulture's eye hath not seen, but a path which leads to the Heart of the Rose. The exercised Christian believer is led into the mystery of union with the Son of God ; and it is to the open mind and adoring heart of such that the flaming vision is vouchsafed and "the Interior Translation and the Mystic Apocalypse" known. This the Philistines understand not. It has been pointed out that "the special patrimony of Christian Mysticism" is the "mystery of universal symbolism," which is intimately connected with the spiritual theory of life. And this precious heritage has charmed many to the Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The everlasting power and divinity of the invisible things are, since the creation of the world, clearly seen by the Christian mystic, being, as

St. Paul says, "perceived through the things that are made." By means of the Christian symbolism the soul that is clothed with humility advances by a sequence of mystic experience towards the supreme sacrament of the everlasting light. The dictum that "esoteric Christianity holds all" is to be interpreted in this sense. Undeniable though it be that the growing revelations and enlarged experiences of the Christian mystic are both sealed and secret things for all those who have never passed the mystic portal, and, in consequence, have never shared them, it is nevertheless true that if we desire, the door is opened to us, if we dare, the gain is glorious, if we "will" to do, the great achievement is possible. But we always need to remember that the subject of the art requires, as Raymund says, its proper earth.

Any religion, it may be affirmed, to have life and power must be mystical; and all truly religious men are mystics. That contemplative author, Mr. A. C. Benson, writing *From a College Window*, has said in his essay on religion: "There is a motto which I should like to see written over the door of every place of worship, both as an invitation and a warning: THOU SHALT MAKE ME TO UNDERSTAND WISDOM SECRETLY.

8 CONCERNING MYSTICS AND MYSTICISM

It is an invitation to those who enter, to come and participate in a great and holy mystery ; and it is a warning to those who believe that in the formalities of religion alone is the secret of religion to be found." Without the mystic element religion becomes always an external, and often an empty thing. The life-blood of the Christian faith is its mysticism ; and the Church, to quote the words of Dr. Bigg, " can never get rid of the mystic spirit, nor should she attempt to do so, for it is, in fact, her life. It is another name for conscience, for freedom, for the rights of the individual soul, for the grace and privilege of direct access to the Redeemer for the presence of the Divine Spirit in the heart. You cannot quench this prophecy."

If we add to these considerations the governing idea of unity, and the illuminating idea of eternity, we grasp, though we cannot exhaust the vital content of mysticism.

The unwavering belief, then, of the Christian mystic is that it is possible to apprehend and assimilate spiritual truths ; and in quietness and confidence he finds not only strength, but illumination. The knowledge of God which he seeks is attained by a fruitful stillness. He listens and

waits for the still small voice of God speaking to him, and he believes that there is no knowledge of divine things so precious and so sure as that which is imparted in this way. Modern psychology might express this fact by speaking of "an extension of the frontier of consciousness," but such a phrase scarcely conveys to the devout religious soul the deep meaning embodied in the aspiration of his heart.

No man, it has been said, can see God's face and live; but apart from communion with God we must die, and the mystic grounds the possibility of knowledge of God in the fact that man is a partaker of the divine. To accomplish our end in the spiritual order we must know God. We can know the divine, because, potentially, we are divine. He maintains to the full the stupendous and awful truth that man is made in the image of God. Every man may be a saint if he so wills, because God so willed it from the beginning. Doubtless this is a great mystery, but in its light many other dark things become clear.

If the divine image in man has been defaced, the divine wisdom will be obscured, for "the God-light falls lost, if it shine, on the eye unresponsive and blind." Only the pure in heart

10 CONCERNING MYSTICS AND MYSTICISM
can see God—that is, only the pure in heart can enjoy unbroken communion with Him, as they bow before “the Closed Eye of the Unknown Darkness.” There is a way for man to rise—the *scala perfectionis*—a path by which the mystic ascends on stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things. Losing his life and freed from the bondage of self and sin, he gains the life which is life indeed, and enters upon that uphill road which knows no other goal than union with God. He tends and waters the garden of his soul, that one day he may behold blossoming “the splendid white flower which is red inside.” The Christian mystic is a sojourner and stranger in the wilderness of this world, and his life is a pilgrimage towards the “serene and solemn spirit-land,” as it is called by Goethe, which is the soul’s true home. He knows “that there is indeed but one thing needful, which is the union of the soul with God.”

Mysticism has often been identified, though erroneously, with symbolism or allegorism, but these should rather be regarded as handmaids which attain considerable prominence in the mystical interpretation of the world around. To the mystic “it may be truly said that the whole

universe bursts forth into a flame and blossoming of parable, symbol, and sacrament." He believes, with fervour, that the highest spiritual truths may be enshrined in symbol and metaphor, and that our consciousness of these things can only thus be expressed, though some have risen beyond them. But all mystics would maintain that allegory, parable, and ceremony are economies of divine things and fraught with eternal meanings. All language, in this connection, must be analogical, suggesting and dimly hinting at the form of the hidden reality. Regarding all the natural things of life as sacramental, the mystic believes that—

. . . By a quest

Which does not take too far or ask too much
He can achieve their meanings, and the grace
Which lies within, their living language learn,
And this shall take him past all outward pomps
Far into vision, far through Mystery.¹

Thus, through nature, he is led into the deeper life of the spirit; and by patiently treading the inner way he comes to possess a knowledge of the secrets of that life which is hid with Christ in God. More life and fuller is the desire of the mystic; and the life more abundant is to

¹ A. E. Waite, *A Book of Mystery and Vision*.

be found alone by the inward way. The kingdom of God is within. Hence the saying that the Christian mystic is concerned with three great mysteries: God, the Soul, and Revelation.

It should be said in passing that it is only those blind to the sublimity of the mystic's ideal, who (as Mr. Swinburne has finely observed in his discriminating essay on William Blake), "regard mysticism with distaste or contempt, as essentially in itself a vain or noxious thing—a sealed bag or bladder that can only be full either of wind or of poison."

The mystic's path—and the only path leading to the goal of the Soul—is "the interior way," of which much will be said later on. For the present, it may be stated briefly as consisting of three stages. The first is that of purgation, in which the soul is by discipline purified from the lusts which war against her. This is followed by illumination, when divine things are made visible to the expectant. The last stage is that of full contemplation of and union with the divine, when the soul no longer sees through a glass darkly, but is at one with God, and inhabits "those worlds of eternity in which we shall live for ever in Jesus our Lord."

To sum up, one may say that the mystic strives to see God in all life, and all life in God. Visible things are transformed into symbols of the invisible,

With angels planted in hawthorn bowers,
And God Himself in the passing hours.

He lives and labours under other heavens than those recognised by the people who, as Plato said long ago, live the life of a shell-fish. He proves the integrity of his purpose and the sincerity of his faith by a rigorous discipline of his life. And although the history of Mysticism shows disastrous aberrations, yet "one may think it worth while to follow out and track to its root the peculiar faith or fancy of a mystic without being ready to accept his deductions and his assertions as absolute and durable facts." For those of us who in this house of our earthly tabernacle feel the bitterness of our exile, the sight of those who have won their way and are now at home in God is of immeasurable worth, and oft-times we wonder—

How will it come to us, that great day? What will the dawn disclose?

Past veils expended, the omens ended, what truth at the heart of those?

CHAPTER II

ST. PAUL AND ST. JOHN

ST. PAUL is the prince of all true Christian mystics, for not only is he the most mystical of all New Testament writers, as has often been pointed out, but he is also the one who has penetrated farthest into the mystery of the kingdom of God.

His gospel, as he affirms, came to him through revelation of Jesus Christ; and he was brought to know the wisdom of God in a mystery. A careful study of St. Paul's mysticism is essential, therefore, if we would seize the secret held by the cloud of witnesses. At the outset, it is well to notice that his entire career was changed as a consequence of a vision which came to him as he journeyed along the road to Damascus—a vision to which, in after-years, he could declare, "I was not disobedient." In this vision, he says with simplicity and calmness, Christ appeared to him. Elsewhere he speaks

of visions and revelations which he received of divine things. At various times he puts it on record that he saw visions and heard voices; and once, at least, he was caught up in an ecstasy and heard things unutterable. He identifies himself with "a man in Christ," who, "whether in the body or apart from the body," he knew not, was caught up to the third heaven, into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. He glories on behalf of such a man, and by reason of the exceeding greatness of the visions and revelations of the Lord. The question may be asked, "Did St. Paul gain greater insight into divine truth as a consequence?" Perhaps not, directly. There is a saying which is attributed to Aristotle, concerning the Greek mysteries, to the effect that "the initiated learned nothing precisely, but received impressions, and were put into a certain frame of mind." We may assert, then, that visions and ecstasies do not constitute the heart of mystic experience—that lies elsewhere.

The mystical union of the believer with Christ is the most conspicuous feature of St. Paul's mysticism, which always has the Son of God

at its central shrine. "It was the good pleasure of God to reveal His Son in me," writes St. Paul ; and from that moment in his life to the close, the idea of a vital union between himself and Christ was always present to him. He was united with Christ and lived in Him. This mystic experience, which had become the great reality of his life, he desired all his converts to share. He writes to them, therefore, of the mystery "now made manifest to the saints . . . which is Christ in you." Closely allied to this, is the further mystical idea of the soul of a Christian experiencing and passing through, even in a measure sharing in the redemptive process of Christ. Always he bears about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifest in him. Nay, he even fills up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ. This process of identification with Christ in His sufferings, of being crucified with Christ, symbolically spoken of, by one mystic writer, as tasting His death, is but another aspect of Christ being formed in the soul of the Christian. But the mystic passes onward from this stage to that of participation in the Divine nature, in which he, as in a mirror, reflects the glory of the Lord. His real personality,

CHRIST THE MYSTIC HEAD 17

as distinct from his individuality, can only be attained in this manner. Not to be unclothed but to be clothed upon is his desire, and to be filled with all the fulness of God is his ultimate goal.

St. Paul lays great stress, in his mystical teaching, on the Headship of Christ. Christ is not only all in all, the one eternal source of life, and the Image of the invisible God, but He is the mystic Head of the whole creation. According to their several capacities, all created beings are images of Him and share His life. He is the Head of all principality and power, and in Him we are made full. Holding fast the Head, all the body increaseth with the increase of God.

St. Paul adds to his mystical conception of the Person and work of Christ the mystical conception of the Church as the Bride of Christ. This latter idea has exercised a very potent influence in the history of mystical theology; and, occasionally, its greatness and fruitfulness have been obscured by repugnant perversions of the holy truth which it enshrines. According to St. Paul, Christ is the Head, and the Church is the body; neither is complete apart from the other. Christ needs the Church, and the Church needs Christ. The Church

stands in a relation of dutiful subjection to her Lord, and Christ's attitude towards His Church is that of gracious protection. St. Paul regards the sacrament of marriage as a parable of the mystic union by which the Church is one with Christ. The Church, then, is the mystical body of Christ, cleansed and sanctified and glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

Undoubtedly much of the language and imagery employed by St. Paul is taken over from the Greek mysteries. For example, there is the constantly recurring idea of maturity or perfection, in which degrees of initiation are assumed. He speaks wisdom, he says, among the perfect—that is, among those who are fully initiated, and therefore are able to apprehend not only the lesser but also the greater mysteries. He labours to the end that he may present every man perfectly initiated in Christ Jesus.

He speaks of a personal experience of the divine fellowship which is only known by enlightenment, by illumination. He teaches, however, that it is possible for all men to be enlightened. The necessary conditions of initiation are not, or ought not to be, a barrier to any. Being cleansed from all defilement of flesh and spirit,

we begin the mystic ascent, and guided by the lamp of love it is possible for all to reach the radiant summit.

St. Paul's doctrine of the Spirit is characteristic and very suggestive. It is the letter which killeth, but the Spirit which giveth life ; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. It is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus which makes us free, and which searcheth all things, even the deep things of God. To walk in the Spirit is to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, and these are love, joy, and peace. We are not under law, if we are led by the Spirit. In some places, St. Paul seems to identify Christ with the Spirit, for he writes of those who, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit. Christ is a "life-giving Spirit," and if any man have not this spirit he cannot be a partaker of spiritual things.

It is important to observe that St. Paul continually insists that divine truths are spiritually discerned, and he alone that is spiritual judgeth all things. It is the spiritual being or "the Concealed Man" who can tread the unscaled heights

and sound the unmeasured profundities. No gift is to be more earnestly coveted than that of spiritual understanding, for only thus can we compare spiritual things with spiritual. This doctrine of the inner light is universally characteristic of mystical theology, and is, undoubtedly, one liable to grave and mischievous perversion; but in essence, and as stated by St. Paul, it is a divine and precious truth. It is the affirmation of the great fact that there is a higher faculty than that of "reasoning," that the spiritual man possesses and exercises an intuitive instrument of knowledge, and that he "knows" by an interior process in the spiritual part of his being.

The Gospel according to St. John has been regarded by some initiates as the charter of Christian mysticism, and it is easy to understand this view, when we remember that many of the distinctive features of mysticism are found in it. The Incarnation is the fact which dominates the Gospel throughout, and it is the supreme revelation of the divine. No man hath seen God at any time, but He has been declared by the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father. It is thus that the Eternal Life and the Eternal Love have been manifested to men;

by the Word which was with God, and was God. Through Him all things were made, and that which hath been made was life in Him ; and the life was the Light of men. St. John then regards the whole creation as part of the manifestation of the Divine Word, and he constantly employs as symbols of unseen things and eternal realities, things which are seen and temporal.

The supreme revelation of divine things is expressed by, and in Christ. It can only be communicated, however, to those who stand in a divine relationship. It is a distinct and definite revelation, although it can be only gradually unfolded.

Very important in St. John's teaching is the idea of a new birth or a birth from above, which is the one indispensable condition of entering upon the soul's great quest. Until a man be born from above he cannot even see the kingdom of God, and except a man be born of the Spirit he cannot enter it. St. John teaches that whosoever believeth on Jesus as the Christ is begotten of God, is born of the Spirit. Further, the soul that is begotten of God overcometh the world, and "doeth no sin." We are assured of the victory, because greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world.

St. John's teaching concerning the purification of the soul is very explicit. The soul is cleansed by the indwelling Word, and sanctified by the divine and abiding Truth. It is cleansed and purified in order that there may be fulfilled in it the divine intention. The doctrine of the soul's development, of the progressive realisation of eternal life which we find in St. John's writings, is in substance the same as St. Paul's. Apart from Christ there can be neither growth in grace nor experience of the life that is abundant.

Thus Christ is spoken of as the living Bread, the Bread from heaven, which we must eat and assimilate. To believe on Christ is to receive Him as a principle of life; and Christ Himself becomes a spring of life within our souls. This thought of the soul's participation in Christ is a ruling conception in St. John's mind. Christ is able to communicate the life which He possesses to the believing soul, and such communication means sustenance, growth, and progress. Christ lived for us and died for us; and the meaning of the mystical language concerning the bread and the wine is to be seen in the effects of His life and death, which He communicates to the soul.

Apart from this appropriation of a sacrificial life, a man can have no life in himself; his life is in Christ, and not in himself. St. John would agree with St. Paul that, if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creation,—created in Christ unto good works.

St. John, too, places the mystic idea of unity in the forefront. He agrees with St. Paul that believers are one in Christ, and that their true life is realised only in their abiding union with Him. The fruitfulness of their life is dependent upon their abiding in Christ; for out of Christ they can do nothing. They are to be one, even as the Father and the Son are one,—perfected into one by the indwelling Christ.

St. John's mystical doctrine of the Spirit, which is a very conspicuous feature of his teaching, is markedly akin to that of St. Paul. Divine knowledge follows upon the growing illumination of the Spirit, and by the certainty of the inward assurance, the soul is convinced of the truth of the knowledge imparted, the Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are children of God. In a very mystical passage, St. John speaks of the threefold witness,—the Spirit and the water and the blood,—signifying God's three-

fold testimony as to His gift of eternal life in His Son. The Spirit, says St. John, gives testimony, because the Spirit is the truth ; and Jesus Christ came, not with the water only, but with the water and the blood. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in his own heart. St. John further writes of the Spirit of Truth within us and abiding within us, who shall teach us all things, guiding us into all the truth and declaring the things that are to come. This Spirit, which proceedeth from the Father, convicts the world in respect of sin and of righteousness and of judgment, and bears witness of Christ. Indeed, at times, like St. Paul, St. John seems to identify the Spirit with Christ. The soul needs no other teacher save the Spirit who is the Truth. "Ye have," declares the apostle, "an anointing from the Holy One, and ye all know the anointing which ye received abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you, for His anointing teacheth you concerning all things."

It remains only to note the emphasis which St. John lays on Love in his teaching. Love is of God, and God is Love. We are to love one another as Christ hath loved us, and so manifest the love of God. He who loveth God,

loveth his brother ; and he who dwelleth in love dwelleth in God. He that loveth hath eternal life abiding in him, but he that hateth abideth in death ; and we know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love. "We love," says St. John, "because He first loved us."

CHAPTER III

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, it has been said by Dr. Bigg, was the father of all the Christian mystics, but no mystic himself; that the enchanted garden which he opened for others he did not himself enter; in a word, that Clement shrank from his own conclusions. But this is only true if we agree with Dr. Bigg in regarding mysticism as co-extensive with ecstasy, a view which is surely both arbitrary and unnecessary. "O truly sacred mysteries!" cries Clement, "O stainless light! My way is lighted with torches, and I survey the heavens and God! I am become holy while I am being initiated. The Lord is my hierophant." The man who could write thus must certainly have advanced some way along the mystic path.

Clement's writings cover so wide a field of thought, and embrace so great an area of

Christian doctrine and experience, that it is easy to overlook his distinctively mystical teaching.

His aim was to construct a knowledge of God by which the Christian believer should be initiated into the holy mysteries of his faith—a knowledge of God including the divine secrets, the secret Word, and the mysteries of the Word.

The following sentences will show how Clement regarded the process of initiation into fuller knowledge of the Christian mysteries. "As the word 'child' implies one who is learning, so the word 'man' implies one who is teaching, and in Scripture the word 'man' is employed to express that which is perfect. Our Lord is called a 'man' on account of His being perfect in righteousness; and we shall be perfected when we become the Church and receive Christ as the Head." "Perfection as regards the performance of law is to be but a child in Christ." "When St. Paul became a man he put away childish things—the things of the law, and understood the things of Christ, who in Scripture is called 'the Man.'" "The sick need a Saviour and the lost a guide; the blind, one who shall give light, and the thirsty, the living fountain, that drinking, he shall thirst no more; the dead need life and

the sheep a shepherd ; children need a teacher, and all mankind need Jesus."

This knowledge, it is to be noted, is rooted and grounded in the revelation delivered once for all to the saints.

As a man becomes a new creation in Christ, so from Christ proceeds that fuller manifestation of divine realities which it is life and peace to know. Thus Clement speaks of the initiated as those who have learned the divine mysteries from the only begotten Son, and as becoming pure in heart by means of that knowledge which is through the Son of God. By this means alone are they "initiated face to face into the blessed contemplation." It is Christ, says Clement, the Word of Truth, the Word of incorruption, who regenerates man, leading him back to the truth. Christ is the centre of salvation, and He freely offers light and life to the darkened and dead soul.

There are lesser mysteries and the great mysteries, just as there is a knowledge which is darkly partial and a knowledge which is perfect ; the former lead on to the latter, as the many lead to the one. Babes are to be fed with milk ; the perfect man with solid food. Instruc-

tion in the primary rudiments of the gospel is indeed the first nourishment of the soul; but full and perfect insight into the truth, a contemplation which discerns all mysteries, a comprehension of the blood and flesh of the Word and of the divine power and essence, is needful for the fully-grown man. This latter knowledge is not a barren word, but a sort of divine science which makes all things manifest in their origin, prepares man to know himself, and teaches him to reach out toward God. This knowledge is the perfection of man as man; and the mystic is perfected through the science of divine things, for he is in unison with the Divine Word and intimately united to God. Clement quotes the saying of St. Paul respecting his knowledge in the mystery of Christ, and refers to the special instruction of the perfect which St. Paul alludes to in his epistle to the Colossians. Some mysteries, says Clement, were concealed until the times of the apostles, and were delivered by them as they received them from the Lord. These mysteries which were hidden in the Old Testament are now revealed to the saints. Clement adds, however, that this knowledge is not imparted to all believers. The

vital energies of the spiritual deep and the powers of the world to come are known only by the initiated.

According to Clement there are two forms of truth : one relating to words, and the other to things. This latter, he suggests, is possessed by the initiated alone. Clement makes a distinction between that which is written and its deeper meaning—the concealed reality which is the subject of a higher knowledge. Instruction in the higher form of truth is called illumination, because it makes manifest that which is hidden. It is to be remembered, writes Clement, that neither the prophets nor the Saviour Himself announced the divine mysteries so as to be easily comprehended by every one, but spoke in parables. The deepest interpretation is always the truest. This is not intended to be the negation, but the affirmation of the place of reason as an interpretation of divine realities ; for Clement regards the mystical as springing out of the rational. It cannot be denied that the historical facts of the Christian revelation are accorded their due place in Clement's teaching, but the idea they enshrine is always placed in the forefront ; the outward sign is

acknowledged, but it is the inner truth that is regarded. The mystic possesses the true logic which alone leads to the true wisdom. That true wisdom is the divine power which, knowing things as they are and exempt from all passion, reaches out toward perfection. It cannot be attained apart from the Saviour, who, by the divine word, removes the veil of ignorance spread over the eye of the soul by the things of sense, and gives that which is best—the power of discerning between God and man. The true and spiritual meaning of the Scriptures is possessed by the mystic alone, and to him the sayings of the Lord, though obscure to others, are clear and manifest. He has obtained knowledge concerning all; for, says Clement, “our oracles return answers concerning things present, as they are; concerning things future, as they will be; concerning things past, as they have been.” This knowledge is quite different from that derived through the senses, which is common to all men; it is not born with men, but is acquired by attention, nourishment, and increase. By incessant practice it becomes a habit or disposition; and perfected by mystical initiation, and fixed by love, it cannot fail.

Clement writes : " Man is dear to God, because he is God's workmanship. God commanded the creation of other beings, but He fashioned with His own hands man—breathing into him that which was peculiar to Himself. Therefore that which was fashioned by God after His own image was created by Him—whether chosen on its own account, or on account of something else. If chosen on its own account, God who is goodness loves that which is good ; and that which is called the inspiration or breathing of God is the interior charm rendering man beloved of God. If chosen on account of something else, God's only motive for creating him was that, apart from his existence, God could not be a good Creator, and man could not attain the knowledge of God." Elsewhere Clement says : " Knowledge lies in illumination, and the end of knowledge is rest ; and this is the ultimate object of desire."

Naturally, Clement came to think of the Christian life as consisting of a twofold character—a lower and a higher life. The former lay in obedience to the Christian rule, and in this lower life hope and fear alternated. While by no means the ideal, this life was typical of the vast majority of Christians. The higher and ideal

Christian life was one of full understanding of, and communion with God—a life in which the soul joyfully surrendered to the divine. This surrender, which brought ecstatic joy, was the one utterly desirable end of human endeavour ; and only those who had grown in the knowledge of the Son of God to the stature of the perfect man might attain it. Clement adds that this perfection consists in an abiding communion with God through the Great High Priest, and "in being as like unto the Lord as can be." The mystic is described by Clement as one who is superior to anger and desire, which are both equally irrational. He loves the creature only through the God and Maker of all things, and he has acquired a habit or disposition of self-control, unattended by effort, after the likeness of his Lord. He unites knowledge to faith and love, and is therefore one in his judgment. Being formed into a perfect man after the image of the Lord, he is truly spiritual, and worthy to be called brother by the Lord. At once, he is a friend and a son of God.

Dr. Inge has pointed out that the doctrine of "deification" found its way into the scheme of Christian mysticism through the teaching of

Clement ; but it would, perhaps, be more correct to say that Clement only seized upon and emphasized, somewhat too unguardedly and too unreservedly, certain aspects of Pauline mysticism. Clement constantly refers to the statement that God formed man in His image and after His likeness, and explains this to mean that man at his birth receives the image, but only acquires the likeness gradually, and as he draws nearer to Christian perfection. "Christ alone," says Clement, "who is exempt from passions and affections, is at once in the image and after the likeness." Clement, however, is not careful enough in preserving the distinction he notes, and he sometimes speaks of the mystic or perfect Christian as formed in the image and after the likeness of God. By knowing God, man may be assimilated to God, and by the indwelling of the Word, may even become God. The union of the Holy Spirit with the soul of man enables the mystic to perfect within him the likeness of the divine image ; and "the image of God," says Clement, "is His Word." The mystic's whole life is prayer and converse with God, and although to speak of the soul as "training itself to be God" is doubtless open to objection,

the idea which it embodies is essentially a true one, and, as an ideal, ought to be present before the mind and imagination of all Christians.

Clement teaches that the mystic having passed through the successive stages of initiation will arrive at the highest place of rest, in which he will contemplate God face to face with full knowledge and understanding "in the Holy Mountain of the Lord, in the Church above. There are the divine philosophers, the true Israelites, the pure in heart, in whom is no guile—no longer remaining in the Hebdomas of rest, but by active well-doing, after the Divine Image, looking up to the inheritance in the Ogdoas." Advancing continually in the work of perfection, the Mystic "hastens through the Holy Hebdomas, to the Father's Habitation, the Mansion of the Lord, about to become, so to speak, an eternally permanent light for ever unchangeable."

In setting forth the progressive realisation of the higher Christian life, Clement employs some of the ideas and language of the Greek mysteries with which he was familiar. In particular, he insists upon the place and power of purgative discipline. It is only the pure in heart to whom

divine illumination is given; they, and they only, can enter the shrine. In order to attain this purity, the soul must be purged from the dross of this world, thus escaping the snare of sensual pleasure and self-satisfied ease. A separation without regret from the body and its passions, says Clement, is not only a sacrifice acceptable to God, but it is essential to the higher life of the spirit. Clement writes: "The soul of the mystic must be denuded of the material skin, freed from bodily trifling and all the passions which vain and false opinions engender, and having put away fleshly lusts must be consecrated to the light. He begins the purgative process by confession, and the contemplative process by analysis. . . . If, then, we cast ourselves into the greatness of Christ, and go forward with purity into profundity, we shall approach to the notion of the Almighty, knowing, indeed, not what He is, but what He is not." Clement adds that we are unable, of ourselves, to attain to this knowledge: it is the gift of God through His Son.

Of cleansing through the Word and growth in the grace of illumination, Clement writes thus: "Our sins are forgiven by one sovereign

medicine, which is baptism according to the Word; in this we are cleansed from all our sins and immediately pass from our evil state. This is one grace of illumination, for no longer is our way of life after the manner in which we walked before we were cleansed, because knowledge grows with illumination—enlightening the understanding. Thus we who were untaught are now called disciples.” Or again: “It is called ‘washing,’ for by it we are cleansed from our sins; ‘grace,’ for by it the punishment due to our sins is forgiven; ‘illumination,’ for by it we see that holy saving Light, and our sight is made keen to see the Divine nature; ‘perfection,’ for nothing is wanting to the soul that knows God.” Elsewhere Clement sums up the process thus: “Being baptised, we are illuminated, being illuminated, we are adopted; being adopted, we are perfected; being perfected, we are made immortal.” Always, Clement maintains that “the Word is the source of all the true knowledge to which man attains”; “the wisdom of God”; “the genuine wisdom, the sanctification of knowledge”; “the person of the revealed truth”; “the person or face of God, by which He is brought to light or revealed,”

Purgation, Clement teaches, is the means by which purity is gained, and purity is a preliminary to positive holiness. Hence, Clement assigns no mean place to the discipline of fasting, which purifies the soul from matter, and renders both body and soul pure and light to receive the divine disclosures. Mystically, he tells us, fasting shows that as life in each individual is supported by food, and not to be nourished by food is a symbol of death, so it is incumbent upon us to fast from worldly things that we may be dead to them, while partaking of divine food we may live to God. Purity is then not simply the absence of evil, but the presence of good. "Purity is to think holy things." Without this, no true knowledge, no mystical illumination is possible. This, and this only, is the one thing needful, though prayer and patient study of Scripture (which Clement teaches as admitting of a fourfold interpretation), go hand in hand with it.

Further, according to Clement, the more a man loves, the more deeply does he penetrate into God. The loving soul will make his whole life a continued act of prayer, for he knows that he is living always in the presence of God. Without

love, no course of purgation or discipline will bring the soul to perfection. Perfection is attained only when the soul hangs upon the Lord through faith, and knowledge, and, especially, love. Mystical knowledge is given only to those who love much.

The final state of the mystic is perpetual contemplation of God, and in this his blessedness consists. The soul, says Clement, contemplates no longer in a mirror or through a glass, but looks eternally upon the vision in all its clearness—the vision with which the soul, smitten with boundless love, can never be filled. To hold intercourse with God eternally, is the final operation of the mystic. He rests in the holy mountain of the Lord together with the Church above.

Of those who have studied with patience and sympathetic insight the mystical teaching of Clement, few will be found to dispute the pronouncement of Dr. Bigg, that among Christian writers, none till very recent times has so clear and grand a conception of the development of the spiritual life. He was a master of that spiritual science which treats of the evolution or development of humanity by the Interior

Way towards God who is the Beginning and End of all.

Perhaps no study of Clement could furnish us with a more faithful knowledge of his mystical teaching than is to be found in the words of the following prayer :

“ O Lord, grant that we, who follow Thy injunctions, may perfect the likeness of Thy image. . . . Grant that we all, living in Thy peace, translated into Thy City, safely sailing through the waves of sin, may be tranquilly borne along together with the Holy Spirit, the ineffable Wisdom ; and day and night until the perfect day, may praise with thanksgiving, and give thanks with praise, to the only Father and Son . . . together with the Holy Spirit, all things in one ; in Whom are all things ; through Whom all things are one ; through Whom is eternity ; Whose members we all are. Amen.”

CHAPTER IV

DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

DIONYSIUS has been called by Vaughan "the mythical hero of mysticism," for, although we know that the author of the treatises and letters which have come down to us under the name of Dionysius was not St. Paul's Athenian convert, yet both the date and nationality of the monk or priest who wrote them are shrouded in mystery. Whoever he was, he effectually suppressed his own individuality by ascribing his writings to Dionysius the Areopagite. It is still convenient to allow him the name he assumed.

Unlike his master Hierotheus, Dionysius aims at a constructive philosophy of Christian truth, and in his system the Platonic elements are very marked. Influenced greatly by the teaching of Proclus, he sought to assimilate the finest spirit of Neo-Platonism to the current statements

of Christianity. Christianity, he holds, rightly understood, is the one perfect and absolute philosophy.

Starting from a conception of God as the ground or being of all that is, Dionysius affirms that as all things have come from God, so the goal of the whole creation is return to God. "All things flow out from God, and all will ultimately return to God." His conception of creation is a modification of the Neo-Platonic theory of emanation, which "assumes the world to be an effluence or irradiation of God, in such manner that the remoter emanation possesses ever a lower degree of perfection than that which precedes it; and represents consequently the totality of existence as a descending series." Thus to Dionysius, everything that exists is in its degree "a symbolic manifestation of the super-existent," though God Himself is beyond all negation and affirmation. The whole world is a divine allegory, furnishing us with a true though partial idea of the nature of God.

The outer world

Marks but the limit of the human soul's

Advance, developing her infinite.

O blessed promise of the time to come!

At each succeeding stage more lofty types—
A wider world—significance more deep—
Till, in the full possession of itself,
The soul attains, from every type set free,
The supra-conscious life of pure repose
And unveil'd vision into God the All.

While Dionysius teaches that the whole universe is to be regarded as an allegory of God, he is careful to point out that God Himself is the Absolute, and beyond both essence and knowledge. We can, indeed, speak of Him by different analogies, though many mystics have persistently endeavoured to rise beyond these—leaving all symbols and metaphors behind. It is a supreme truth that “the One who is said to become multiform” in the world must embrace all that is good and true and beautiful, and hence we find Dionysius affirming that “the Non-Existent also must participate in the Good and Beautiful.” But the Mystic cannot rest in these finite embodiments or manifestations of the Good and Beautiful, because “the Absolute Good and Beautiful is honoured by abstracting all qualities from it.” It is the “supra-rational Unity” that the Mystic seeks—that “Unity which unifies every unity.” Being and Life,

Wisdom and Beauty are manifestations of God, but God Himself is none of these.

Accordingly, to Dionysius, advance in the knowledge of God is not made by any affirmation concerning Him, for no name can adequately convey a knowledge of God's essential being ; it is, therefore, only by a sequence of symbols and rites that the soul can rise to the reality of God. The nearer we draw to the Centre and Fount of Light, says Dionysius, the clearer and truer becomes our apprehension. The evolution or progression of the spiritual principle towards perfection can be effected only by the love of God, and it is only by the love of God that we can gain a true knowledge of Him. But when this is attained, there is no joy equal to the joy of the accompanying great enlightenment.

The return of the soul to God, which Dionysius calls "deification," is the consummation of the creature's life—a consummation aspired to unceasingly. The soul waits and watches until the day break and the shadows flee away, and God be all in all.

To call Dionysius a pantheist, as has often been done, is a mistake. God alone has life in Himself; although the world is an outcome of

that life, and indeed, a necessary expression of the Divine Being. It is only as God dwells in any being that such being possesses real existence, the life of the creature being determined by the relation which it sustains to the Centre and Fount of life. Divine immanence is in no sense the characteristic feature of the cosmology of Dionysius, who goes so far, indeed, in maintaining the transcendent character of God, that he is led to make the extravagant statement: "Being is in Him, He is not in being." God, he repeatedly says, is the unity which comprehends all differences—not abolishes them, and as He is before all things so He is the end of all things. But to predicate anything of God, is really to veil Him, because He is so far beyond anything that it is possible for man to affirm. We know more of God the more of Him we possess; we possess more of God, the nearer we dwell to the Centre.

Concerning the mystical *via negativa* and the *via affirmativa*, Dionysius has much to say of interest and value. The former is the ascending process, or the return journey to God by means of abstraction and analysis. The latter is the descending process, or the outflow through finite existences. As Dr. Inge has pointed out, the

conclusion of the former is "God is all," the conclusion of the latter is "all is not God." Thus, as we have already noted, anything we may assert concerning God only serves to veil Him, while anything we deny concerning Him results in a partial unveiling.

The highest as well as the truest knowledge of God is attained, according to Dionysius, in a mystic ignorance. The mystic, he says, "must leave behind all things both in the sensible and in the intelligible worlds, till he enters into the darkness of ignorance that is truly mystical." This is a divine state of darkness, it is dark only through excess of light. It has been described by the apostle Paul as "the light unapproachable." Perhaps in no respect has the influence of Dionysius been more marked than in his teaching and doctrine of "the divine dark." The mystic believes that clouds and darkness surround the great white throne, and that God dwelleth in thick darkness, beyond the light of setting suns. Thus it is imperative for the mystic to seek to ascend beyond the ignorance which veils itself in words to a true mystic ignorance in which "darkness" God dwells and may be found. As our knowledge of God is best

expressed, according to Dionysius, by abstraction, by negations, so the mystic aim is to reach the Divine incomprehensible unity in the Divine obscurity. This is essentially a spiritual state, signifying to Dionysius as well as to the great mediæval mystics who were profoundly influenced by him, the supreme and most exalted state possible to the soul—the intimate communion with the Universal—the union of the spirit of man with the Spirit of God. To be glorified in God and by God is the end for which man was created, and the mystic can rest in no lesser beatification than this.

This was the belief of Dionysius, and we are not surprised, therefore, to find that he urges the necessity of denuding the mind and stripping the soul of all sensuous images, which can only enmesh and ensnare. We must rigorously turn aside, not only from the fashions of this world, which are fleeting and cunning deceits, but emancipate ourselves from the allurements of the senses, and transcend even our intellectual knowledge of God. Dionysius calls for the cultivation of a passionless passivity by means of which the soul shall realise the divine. This is the one thing of vital import to the mystic.

To hear and to see and to know, and, immersed where the
lights never fail,
Confess that at length we have truly transcended the world
of the veil ;
We have pass'd through the region of omen, and entered
the land of sight ;
Oh, thanks be to God for the pillar of smoke by day and
the pillar of fire by night ;
The voice in the cloud and the burning bush and the holy
places trod ;
For the soften'd grace of the shaded face and the back of
the Lord our God ;
For the shadow'd home and the light beyond, for the
secret pulses stirr'd
By the parable dim and the mystic hymn and the first
sense of the Word !
But O for the end and the vision, beyond the gate and
the way,
The light which the eye cannot picture, repose in activity free !
The veils of the world are about me, sad dreams of the
night and the day,
But I look to see !¹

The soul, according to Dionysius, is bipartite, and possesses a higher and lower faculty. The higher faculty is able to apprehend the divine image immediately, the lower faculty only by means of symbols. Despite the necessity for rising above symbolic representations, we cannot dispense with symbols, for they are—

¹ A. E. Waite, *A Book of Mystery and Vision*.

The ministries of deep
And many-sided emblems which exist
For man alone, developing for him
Resources in the measure of his need,
His insight, inquest, and experiment.

It has been already suggested that, as Dionysius states, material things are symbols of the Divine reality, and that the symbolism of Nature is a partial revelation of God. Symbols can only shadow forth figuratively and darkly ; and it is only the fruits of the valley that we attain through them, but they prepare us for receiving the holy fruit of the Tree of Life. They give us true, albeit partial impressions of the Divine character ; and it is by means of earthly things that we learn the first secrets of the heavenly. We rise from "white sacraments and parables," until we reach the One Eternal Truth amid the white radiance of Eternity. To the eye of the mystic, the whole creation is a Divine allegory ; and in this sense, all that exists is a symbolic manifestation and revelation of the Fount and Source of Life.

Tradition and Scripture itself, Dionysius teaches, are to be read symbolically, for only in this way can their hidden truths be revealed. The same principle of interpretation Dionysius

applies to the liturgy and offices of the Church, but here, it is to be noted, Christ—the Incarnate Son—is the One, True, and Divine Illuminator. From the dim shades of time the Divine Hierophant leads the soul on to the burning bliss of the Eternal Light.

Undoubtedly, the teaching of Dionysius under this head is open to misconstruction, and it has seemed inconsistent to not a few careful students. He writes of Christ as the Cause of all things, filling all things and sustaining all the separate parts of the universe, (in accordance with the perfect whole,) by His essential Deity which includes all the parts and the full whole in Itself. Being the prime Author of perfection, It is perfect in the imperfect, while in perfect things It is imperfect, because alike in dignity and origin It transcends their perfection. It is the Being which completely inhabits all beings perfectly, while at the same time It is wholly exalted above all beings. At once It determines all the principles of things and stands above all principles and ordinances. In a word, It is exalted over all things. Thus, as Dorner pointed out, the conception of Dionysius regarding the participation of Christ in the transcendence of God and the

conception of a Divine, super-essential, formless essence, made it difficult for him to do justice to the Christian doctrine of Incarnation or to assign to Jesus a distinct and unique place in the universe. Hence, the Logos is violently identified in his system with Jesus, who is, however, the Revealer, the Illuminator, and the great High Priest. Upon this Dionysius is emphatic; Christ is the Light-Bearer and the Light-Bringer to the soul. Dionysius regards the technical terms of the Greek mysteries—purification, illumination, and perfection—the three stages in the mystical ladder, as representing, or as being represented by the three sacraments of Baptism, the Eucharist, and Unction. They signify respectively the cleansing of the soul, the participation of the soul in divine knowledge, and the actual communion and union of the soul with God. The three embrace the science of the return of the spirit of man to its source.

Of the mystical union of the soul with God, of the absorption of the many into the One, Dionysius, while fervently believing it to be the ultimate end and consummation of mystic desire, as is obvious from what has been previously affirmed, does not always write explicitly. He

emphatically believes, however, that walking the inner way, living in the presence and in the power of the Spirit, and constrained by a passionate love of God, the initiated soul may attain even in this body of humiliation a height surpassing far the region bounded by vision, and in the end become truly one with God. The love of the soul for God becomes, in the end, one with the Love of God, which, says Dionysius, is "an eternal circle from goodness, through goodness, and to goodness."

CHAPTER V

MASTER ECKHART

MANY critics of mysticism have alleged that the only pathway to the universal, acknowledged by the mystic, is that of the negation of the individual. As we have had occasion to observe already, this is a pure misapprehension, where it is not a wilful perversion of mysticism. That this false idea has existed so long is doubtless due to the contradictions, sometimes real, but more often apparent, in the language employed by mystical writers. To avoid this altogether is difficult, if not impossible, "because the phrases that do well enough in space and time are inadequate with the things of eternity. There the contradictions must meet and be reconciled."¹

Eckhart has suffered much on account of, not the obscurity, but the apparent contradictions in his statement of the truth. He wrote in German, and for the general public; and as Dr. Inge has

¹ Professor Ritchie, *Philosophical Studies*, p. 241.

pointed out, Eckhart's "desire to be intelligible to the general reader led him to adopt an epigrammatic, antithetic style, and to omit qualifying phrases. This is one reason why he laid himself open to so many accusations of heresy."

As a Dominican monk, sometime prior of Erfurt and vicar-general of Thuringen in later years, vicar-general of Bohemia, he lived a strenuous and consecrated life. He was influenced greatly by the writings of Dionysius and Augustine, Erigena and Aquinas; and the inner life of his spirit was greatly enlarged by the societies of those of his day who followed the gleam of the inward light. A few years before his death he preached frequently at Cologne—his discourses attracting much attention. They were as strong spirit music, hard for tongue to utter and difficult for ear to understand.

Eckhart, in common with all the mystics, regards the supreme satisfaction of the soul as dependent upon a true knowledge of God. He grounds the possibility of such knowledge on the fact that God being immanent as well as transcendent, may be known in all things. To apprehend God better in one thing than in

another, is perhaps the lot of the many ; but the more excellent way is to apprehend God everywhere, "for to that end do all things exist." In God, says Eckhart, all things are one, from angel to spider, yet not all the fulness of the creatures can express God any more than a drop of water can express the ocean.

Notwithstanding the soul's necessity of a knowledge of God, it is better, says Eckhart, to be silent about Him : "God cannot be named, because no man can say anything or understand anything about Him. If I say, 'God is good,' it is not true ; nay further, I am good, God is not good. I might further say, 'I am better than God,' for whatever is good may become better, and whatever may become better may become best. Now God is not good, because He cannot become better ; and since He cannot become better He cannot become best, for these things 'good,' 'better,' and 'best' are far from God, since He is above all. . . . Thou canst understand nothing about God, because He is above all understanding."

Now, such teaching as this has its dangers, and it is easy to see how the mystic is led to such extravagances of statement as : "God in

Himself was not God—in the creature only hath He become God.” Thus the whole creation is an expression of the divine life and personality, and to apprehend and to share in this is man’s highest good. That man to whom God is seen alike in all things is on the way to the attainment of the soul’s purpose. Yet this achievement is in reality only the first sense of the soul’s divine quest. To trace the correspondences in the material world with the high and supreme truth beyond is indeed a praiseworthy occupation ; but, as Saint-Martin asks : “ If this world will seem to us, after our death, as nothing but magical illusion, why do we regard it otherwise at present ? The nature of things does not change.”

Despite the foregoing, the knowledge of divine truth and its apprehension by man is desired by God, though it can be attained only through the abandonment of earthly things. Man never desires anything so earnestly, affirms Eckhart, as God desires to bring a man to Himself that he may know Him—the Alpha and Omega of the mystery of divine and spiritual things. In this divine disclosure nothing is lacking ; “ it is full and complete, and God is

constrained to give it thee, since He cannot cease till He hath given thee Himself."

Eckhart writes: "As the soul, through God, loses itself and abandons all things, so does it find itself again in God. When it knows God it knows itself—as well as all the things from which it has disjoined itself—perfectly in God." This is simply another form of the mystic doctrine of dying to self and living in God. By abandoning all things the soul finds itself in God, for "in every man who hath utterly abandoned self, God must communicate Himself according to all His power." Nothing is more deplorable in the life of man than the fact that it is the man himself who prevents the approach of the divine. Thus an unhesitating abandonment is the nearest way to God. But the work of divine union can only be accomplished by a strong and constant resolution on the part of the soul that desires it, in true humility which is capable of utter abasement. God is nigh unto us, but we are far from Him; yet, according to the constitution of His nature, God must give, and His very essence inclines Him to give His good gift to us when we are humble. The mystic knows

that if ever the soul is to know God it must forget itself—yea, lose itself, for when the soul knows and sees itself it does not see and know God.

This knowledge of God, Eckhart teaches, is confirmed by inner experience. "How can any external revelation help me unless it be verified by inner experience? The last appeal must always be to the deepest part of my own being." It is the inner voice which is the voice of God, and to hear that we must resolve to descend into ourselves. And this interior light of our being is kindled by God and leads us to Him.

By this knowledge of God, which is one of "the mysteries of our fundamental being," the soul of man is enabled to return to its divine source, and by the inward secret way union with God is made possible.

There is, moreover, something in the soul which is so akin to God that it is one with Him, and not merely united with Him. "I have a power in my soul," writes Eckhart, "which is thoroughly susceptible to and receptive of God: I am as certain as that I live that nothing whatever is so near to me as God. God is nearer to me than I am to myself." The

natural abode of the soul is God, and away from Him it can find no rest.

In storm, in darkness and in stress,
In languor and deep weariness,
What wonder if, o'er life's dark deep—
That tossing sea which dare not sleep—
From time to time on each should come
An exile's sickness for his home.

“ That which God works in the simple light of the soul is more beautiful and more pleasing than all the other works which He performs in all creatures ; only foolish people take evil for good and good for evil. But to the man who rightly understands, the one work which God effects in the soul is better and nobler and higher than all the world, for through that light comes grace. This never comes in the intelligence or in the will, for if this should come to pass the intelligence and the will would need to transcend themselves.” In another place Eckhart says : “ Since God has never bestowed any gift simply that man may rest in the possession of it, and since every gift He has bestowed in heaven and on earth has been given in order that He may be able to give one gift which is Himself, so . . . He will prepare us for the one gift, which is Himself.”

The union of the soul with God takes place, according to Eckhart, in "the little spark." This "spark" is called also the spirit of the soul. There is, then, an experience possible to the exercised believer in which he realises that he has become one spirit with the Lord. It carries with it its own certainty, a deepening certainty growing out of the mystic consciousness of divine sonship. Eckhart constantly emphasises the mystical doctrine of regeneration, in which divine grace aids human weakness, and by the spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirit seals us as sons of God. That which is the essence of all creatures is eternally a divine life in Deity, and the flaming consummation and holy perfection of such a life proceeds from that vital union with God initiated in time in "the little spark." This spark, says Eckhart, rejecteth all creatures, and will have only God simply as He is in Himself. The union is so truly one between life and life that Eckhart enunciates the famous mystical saying: "The eye with which I see God is the same as that with which He sees me." Many have stumbled at this word, some have even wrested it to their own destruction; but the mystics of every age have understood

its truth and accepted it, because, as Saint-Martin has said, "all men who are instructed in fundamental truths speak the same language, for they are inhabitants of the same country."

A favourite and constantly recurring doctrine of all mystics is that of the birth of the Son of God in the soul of the Christian. Eckhart states it boldly in the following words: "When the soul is freed from time and space, the Father sends and begets His Son in the soul." The Holy Father begets the divine Son in us, and "as fire turns all that it touches into itself, so the birth of the Son of God in the soul turns us into God, so that God no longer knows anything in us but His Son."

Such language as this is doubtless unguarded, but the profound truth it embodies is central, and Eckhart himself safeguards the doctrine by his teaching concerning the necessity of the human will obeying the divine behests so perfectly and gladly, that it becomes one with the will of God. He points out that no man is so boorish or stupid or awkward that he cannot, by God's grace, unite his will wholly and entirely with God's will; and when dealing with the problem of pain, Eckhart says that those who

accept all that the Lord sends as the very best, remain always in perfect peace, for in them God's will has become their will. This is incomparably better than that our will should become God's will. The ideal to set before us is the full surrender of the will: "The will is perfect when it has gone forth from itself, and is formed into the will of God. The more truly this is effected, the more perfect is the will. In such a will thou canst do all things." The union of the divine and human will is a work which can be accomplished only by the fervent and persistent resolution of those who desire it, and in fear and trembling pray that God will work His perfect will in them without let or hindrance.

Eckhart insists that it is by divine grace that we are united to the divine nature, united as the Son is eternally one with the divine nature. If God, says Eckhart, did not abide with and in the creatures, they must necessarily have fallen back, so soon as they were created, into the nothingness out of which they were created; and in order that God's likeness may be brought to perfection in them, "God alone must work in them without hindrance." In this way the soul is brought to understand with God, to will

with God, and to love with God. This is the essence of perfection.

Although Eckhart has no systematic, no formulated doctrine of sin, we may gather up and down his pages sayings showing so much insight into the nature and character of moral evil, that we are constrained to admit his teaching under this head to be very profound. Eckhart goes much further than many of the mystics: for, while he believes that for every soul good is the fulfilment of God's law, and evil that which is opposed thereto, he goes deeper when he says that sin which is deadly separates us from God. Thus, not only does sin hinder man from the attainment of light and truth and produce confusion and disorder both in the universe and in himself, but it hides God's face from him. Eckhart teaches that sin is not only derangement, but the death of the soul. As the natural place of the soul is God, and as sin entering within is like a fire, foreign to the soul's true essence, it is not wonderful that the heart of man should be saddened by weariness and afflicted by torment. Again, Eckhart calls sin a sickness of the faculties. The soul constantly suffers from this sickness, and languishes, until

it is perfectly delivered from it and made whole by the Divine Physician and Repairer. Sin is also a blindness of the sense—a blindness in which man can neither discriminate nor discern between good and evil. Sin separates us from God, who is the life of the soul; therefore Eckhart describes it as a death of all graces. For, if the soul is cut off from the source of all life, it must inevitably follow that the fruits and graces, which are the sign and expression of vital forces working within, will be wanting. Where sin abounds the graces of the soul can never be found.

We ought to pray, Eckhart teaches, both for temporal blessings and spiritual virtues; but he takes care to point out that when we ask for material things we should always add, “if it be God’s will and if it be for my soul’s health.” When, however, we pray for Christian virtues and graces, “we need add no qualification, for these are God’s own working.” When asked what were the greatest goods that God had done to him, Eckhart said they were these three: First, that the lusts and desires of the flesh had been taken away from him; second, that the divine light continually shone and

gave him light in all his doings ; third, that he was daily renewed in virtue, grace, and holiness.

In prayer the mystic does not cry to the heavens, he does not call to a God far off, but to One who is within the soul, an "ever-present Deity." He can pray, therefore, "in all places and among all persons, in the street as well as in the church." Thus the life of the mystic is one of unceasing and prevailing prayer.

The mysticism of Eckhart, like that of all true initiates, had its essentially practical effects in character. What a man has taken in by contemplation, says Eckhart, that he pours out in love. To be a true mystic, one need not go into a desert and fast ; "a crowd is often more lonely than a wilderness, and small things harder to do than great." One is reminded of the deep saying of Ewald, that the true mystic never withdraws himself wilfully from the business of life—no, not even from the smallest business. If, says Eckhart, a man were in an ecstasy like that of St. Paul when he was caught up into the third heaven, and knew of a poor man who needed his help, he ought to leave his ecstasy and help the needy. "It is better to feed the hungry than to see even such visions as St. Paul saw."

The following prayer of Eckhart expresses very truly both the creed and character of the man :—"O Almighty and Merciful Creator and Good Lord, be merciful to me for my miserable sins, and help me that I may overcome every temptation and shameful lust, and may be able to avoid utterly, in thought and deed, what Thou forbiddest ; and give me grace to do and to hold all that Thou hast commanded. Help me to believe, to hope, and to love, and in every way to live as Thou willest, as much as Thou willest, and what Thou willest."

CHAPTER VI

RUYSBROECK

LET it be said at once that the profound insight into spiritual truths which his writings display, and the deep mystical teaching of Ruysbroeck, is not to be measured by his lack of learning or his obscurity of thought. Without following M. Maeterlinck in his extravagant eulogy of Ruysbroeck, it must be admitted that his great mystical treatise, *Ordo spiritualium nuptiarum*, is one of the most valuable works of its kind that exists, marking as it does, with intense force and lofty seriousness, the mystic ascent, and describing with extreme precision and astonishing fulness the steps in the way. All Ruysbroeck's books, as Maeterlinck has pointed out, "treat exclusively of the same science: a theosophy peculiar to Ruysbroeck, the minute study of the introversion and introspection of the soul, the contemplation of God above all similitudes and likenesses, and

the drama of the divine love on the uninhabitable peaks of the spirit."

The truth could hardly be better expressed ; and when we remember that they were all written, as he says, under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, we may well believe that he had drunk deep of the wine of inward joy and spiritual consolation, of which he speaks so often and so rapturously.

He was born, probably, in the year 1293, and died in the year 1381. He was for some time prior of Vauvert, near Brussels, but afterwards retired into the forest of Soignies, where in the convent of Grunthal, spiritually exercised and after much meditation, he wrote most of his books. He seems to have read Dionysius, St. Augustine, Eckhart, and other mystical writers ; but the unsurpassed depth of his thought and spiritual acumen is unquestionably due to the profound spiritual experience, or rather experiences, of a singularly simple and sensitive—perhaps one might even say, emotional—nature, of which he writes at first hand. He himself, as we have already observed, most humbly but most fervently believed that all his mystical writing was done under the direct guidance of

the Holy Spirit, and with a special and most blessed consciousness of the divine presence in his soul. This blessedness included peace, inward quiet, faithful clinging to the source of all joy, sleep in God, and contemplation of the heaven of darkness, far above reason.

It was, in other words, the mystic labour and rest, concerning which Ruysbroeck writes: "In one and the selfsame moment of time, love labours and rests in its love. And the one is made strong by the other, because the higher the love the greater is the rest, while the greater the rest, the dearer is the love; for the one lives in the other; and he who loves not rests not, while he who rests not loves not. There are, however, some good men who believe that they neither love nor rest in God; but this very thought springs from love, and since their desire to love is greater than their ability, it seems to them, therefore, that they are powerless to love. Yet in this labour they taste of love and rest, for only the resigned, the passive, and the illuminated man can understand how it is possible to rest and also to enjoy."

Perhaps no one has written more fully of the stages of the inward way than Ruysbroeck; and

although he would have agreed with the saying of Saint-Martin that Christianity possesses things of great force and great weight which neither are nor can ever be written, yet the three stages of the exiled soul's path have seldom been described more particularly or more faithfully.

The lowest stage is that of the active life. The distinguishing marks of this life are humility, love, and justice. We occupy, preserve, and order the kingdom of our soul, says Ruysbroeck, in going forth by love and the virtues, and it is essential that we go forth by charity and justice towards God, towards our neighbour, and towards ourselves. The greatest of all virtues is love, and Ruysbroeck tells us emphatically that none can enter into the repose that is above action, unless he has first actively loved love. The man who feels or thinks that he can possess God without the exercises of love is deceived. The exercise of love is indispensable.

The middle or second stage is that of the internal life. This denotes the rise of the soul from the exterior to the inner life, which Ruysbroeck sometimes calls the elevated or affective life. It is then that the mystic, having

received the illumination of the intellect, beholds the eternal truth. For this illumination, this spiritual or supernatural vision, as Ruysbroeck calls it, three things are necessary. "First, the light of the divine grace, then the free conversion of the will towards God, and lastly, a conscience pure from all mortal sin." It is by the light of the divine grace alone that the soul can see. Ruysbroeck maintained as fervently as another great mystic that "the entire universe, notwithstanding all the splendours which it displays before our eyes, can never of itself manifest the truly divine treasures," but, "in order that the creature may conceive and comprehend God, it must be drawn up into God from above." Only by the agency and operation of God can the creature comprehend Him. It is divine grace which enables the soul to recognise and realise its latent possibility. To go out towards God by interior love in eternal work, and by joyous inclination to rest in God in eternal repose, to abide in God, and yet go out towards all the creatures in common love, in the virtues, and in the works of justice,—this is the supreme summit of the inner life. The soul that ascends to this height has all things under it, is sanctified by

God, and in "the nothingness of humility" rises beyond all heavens.

While all are not called to the internal life, only few attain the third stage, which is that of the contemplative life. Here, by a process of "deification," the soul makes its ascent to God. At this stage we die to ourselves in God, and God unites us with Himself in eternal love. Thus the soul "sinks into the vast darkness of the Godhead." Very few men attain to this divine contemplation, according to Ruysbroeck, because of their incapacity and the mystery of the light in which contemplation takes place. Only he who is united to God and illuminated in this truth can comprehend the truth by itself.

This contemplation is the eternal recompense of all the virtues and of all life ; none can arrive there by knowledge or subtlety, nor by any exercise ; but he whom God wills to unite to His own spirit and to illuminate by Himself can contemplate God, and none other can. It is to be remembered, however, that "the essential unity of our spirit in God exists not in itself, but abides in God and flows out from God, and is immanent in God and returns to God, as to its eternal cause." And, says Ruysbroeck, as the

abyss of God calls to abyss, so it is with all those whose spirits are united to God in joyous love. All men who are raised above their creatureliness into the contemplative life become one with the divine glory, one with the same light by means of which they see, and which they see. “This calling is an irruption from His essential brightness; and this essential brightness in the embrace of His bottomless love causes us to lose ourselves and escape from ourselves in the lonely darkness of God.”

In another place, Ruysbroeck speaks of the manifestation of God and of eternal life beginning in the abyss of darkness. There the loving spirit is dead to itself. This is the highest state of knowledge to be attained, “the stage of ignorance—where there is neither God nor creature, as far as respects the distinction of persons, but where we in God, and God in us, form one simple blessedness, provided we have all lost ourselves, and have been diffused through, or even dissolved in, the unknown obscurity. This is the highest that can be attained in eternal blessedness, in life, death, enjoyment, love.” Here “we behold the immeasurable glory of God, and our intellect is as clear from all considerations of distinction and

figurative apprehensions, as though we had never seen or heard of such things. Then the riches of God are open to us. Our spirit becomes desireless, as though there were nothing on earth or in heaven of which we stood in need. Then we are alone with God, God and we—nothing else. Then we rise above all multiplicity and distinction into the simple nakedness of our essence, and in it become conscious of the infinite wisdom of the divine essence, whose inexhaustible depths are as a vast waste, into which no corporeal and no spiritual image can intrude. Our created is absorbed in our uncreated life, and we are as it were transformed into God.”

Having won its way, the contemplative spirit enjoying as far as may be in this mortal state a real knowledge of the vision of God, will experience its living efficacy in the perfection of divine rest.

And towards the place of exile, far away,
We shall look back in our relief and say :
Hard was the bed whereon we writhed in sleep ;
But now the vigils of true life repay
With rest divinely deep.¹

We shall, as Ruysbroeck says, understand by love, and we shall be understood by love, and

¹ A. E. Waite, *Strange Houses of Sleep*,¹

God shall possess us and we Him in unity. In a word, we shall enjoy God, and, united to Him, we shall rest in blessedness.

Deep to deep and sea to sea,
Wondrous union, wondrous rest,
And o'erflowing, then shall be
The long pent-up soul express'd.

This is the life of love in its perfection, which Ruysbroeck says is "above reason and higher than all understanding." The union grows closer all the days of our life which becomes an "eternal coming of our Bridegroom." The following words represent, without doubt, Ruysbroeck's own experience: "The coming of the Bridegroom is so swift that He is always coming—dwelling within us with His unfathomable riches—ever returning anew in person, with such new brightness that it seems as if He had never come before. For His coming extends beyond all limit of time into an eternal Now, and He is always received with new desires and new delight. Lo! the joys and the delights which this Bridegroom brings with Him at His coming are boundless and limitless, for they are Himself! For this reason, the eyes of the spirit by which the loving soul beholds its Bridegroom are opened so wide

that they will never close again. The contemplation and the fixed gaze of the spirit are eternal in the secret manifestation of God, and the comprehension of the spirit is so widely opened, as it waits for the appearing of the Bridegroom, that the spirit itself becomes great as that which it comprehends. Thus is God beheld and comprehended by God, in whom all our blessedness is found."

Of the eternal satisfaction of the craving for union with God, it must be admitted that Ruysbroeck often speaks unguardedly. For example, he writes: "In this embrace and essential unity with God all devout and inward spirits are one with God by living immersion and melting away into Him; they are by grace one and the same thing with Him, because the same essence is in both." In such a statement as this, and many others which might be easily adduced, it is obvious there is that which might give rise to a suspicion in the minds of some that the writer had pantheistic tendencies; but Ruysbroeck certainly could not be rightly charged with teaching pantheism, for in numerous passages he insists upon the fact that we remain eternally distinct from God. We arrive, it is true, at the eternal image after which

we were created, and become one with the divine glory, but we also contemplate God. And this is the soul's supreme blessedness, for "here is nought but an eternal rest, in a joyous envelopment of loving immersion, and this is the essence, without mode, which all interior spirits have chosen above all other things. It is the dark silence in which all lovers are lost." The life begun by divine grace, continued by self-denial and discipline, and illumined by the Holy Ghost shed abroad in the heart, finds its completion and perfection in a realised union of the soul with God.

Of the strange and dark vicissitudes through which the soul passes ere it enters the *Mysterium Magnum*, Ruysbroeck writes : " Out of all sufferings and renunciations the man will derive for himself an inward joy, he will resign himself into the hands of God and will rejoice to endure suffering for the promotion of God's glory. And by persevering in this way he will experience secret joys never tasted before, because nothing so rejoices the lover of God as to feel that he belongs to his Beloved " . . . Further, when the time comes all consolation is withdrawn from these exercised spirits "so that they believe

they have lost all their virtues, and are forsaken of God and of every creature, if they know how to gather the various fruits, the corn is ripe and the wine ready." Those souls who walk the way of love, amid all storms, to the place whither love shall lead them, having been disciplined by all the virtues, will be accounted worthy to behold God and partake of that sacrament which will be communicated to those who sit down at "the marriage supper of the Lamb."

Concerning the Person and the work of the Incarnate Son, Ruysbroeck teaches that "the Son is the Image of the Father, that in the Son have dwelt from all eternity, foreknown and contemplated by the Father, the prototypes of all mankind. We existed in the Son before we were born—He is the creative ground of all creatures—the eternal cause and principle of their life. The highest essence of our being rests therefore in God—exists in His image in the Son." "The office of the Son in time was to die for us, fulfil the law, and give us a divine pattern of humility, love and patience. He is the fountain whence flows to us all needed blessing, and . . . what the Son did, He did for all." Ruysbroeck is never weary of insisting that

Christ must be the rule and pattern of our lives, and that often we must needs press ourselves to the wounds and open heart of Christ our Saviour, if in all things we would have God for our aim. In such exercises, visions and great revelations of the Lord have often come to men

Ruysbroeck had a very keen eye for the abuses and the foibles, as well as the vices rife in his day, and as Vaughan points out, he "inveighs with much detail against the vanities of female dress—as to those hair pads, sticking up like great horns—they are just so many 'devil's nests.' " He does not for a moment ignore what is known as the practical side of the religious life, but urges that we must not remain on the top of the ladder, but must descend. A life of meekness, humility, and service is a proof of the birth of the Son in our souls. Or as another mystic has said: "As a proof that we are regenerated we must regenerate everything around us."

Finally, Ruysbroeck affirms that in the interior life, everything depends on the will. It is necessary above all things that a man should will right, fervently. "Will to have humility and love, and they are thine." All things are possible to the willing believer. "On the white colour of inno-

cence we shall place red roses by evermore resisting all that is evil. Thus we maintain purity and crucify our own nature, and these red roses with their sweet perfume are very lovely on the white colour."

CHAPTER VII

SUSO

HENRY SUSO was born in the year 1295 and died in 1365. He was, in many respects, notably in his passionate devotion to the Saviour, akin to the great Spanish mystics, although in his youthful days he had been a disciple of Eckhart at Cologne, of whom he afterwards spoke as "the blessed master Eckhart."

The place and function of asceticism are defined and exemplified in an exaggerated form in Suso, who maintained that the only way to the Crown was the royal way of the Holy Cross ; and so intense was the literalness of his belief, that he practised upon himself the most terrible austerities, with unflinching calmness and unremitting rigour. His descriptions of the visions and ecstasies which came to him are extremely vivid and poetical, for he had by no means a contemptible literary gift—which was suffused through and

through with the warmth of his ardent and affectionate soul.

Dr. Inge has remarked, with much truth, that Suso's autobiography is a document of unique importance for the psychology of mysticism. It may be added that it bears all the marks of the exercised believer, although

The purports deep by which the soul is stirr'd
Lurk not within the manifested word,
As many intimations dimly show,
Directing higher search to those who know.

It was in his eighteenth year that Suso first turned to God, and it was not long after this that he began his ascetic practices. Soon visions were vouchsafed to him, lasting usually about an hour and a half, and by these he was greatly encouraged. It was in one such vision that he saw "the blessed master Eckhart," who told him that the secret of dwelling in God was detachment from the world, and the way to attain this detachment was to die to self, and "to maintain unruffled patience with all men." In another vision he saw a company of angels, of one of whom Suso requested that he might be permitted to see "the manner of God's secret dwelling in the soul." He was bidden cast a

joyous glance into himself, and behold "how God plays His play of Love" with a loving soul—all of which Suso describes with much artless charm.

His affectionate nature could only be satisfied by the highest joy of loving hearts, and thus he was moved to cut the letters of the name of Jesus in his breast, so deeply that he carried the marks throughout his life "about the length of a finger-joint."

After sixteen years of painful penances and austere discipline, he abandoned his extreme asceticism, being warned, he states, by an angel to discontinue his accustomed practices. Thereafter, he did not regard these things as indispensable to the living of a holy life. External marks they had been, though signal proofs of an internal passion; and Suso relates how in a vision the Lord spoke to him, saying: "Hitherto thou hast stricken thyself: now I will strike thee . . . thou shalt be forsaken both by God and the world. . . . Be of good cheer, I will be with thee and aid thee to overcome." The joy of the certainty of the divine presence was for seasons denied him, and he passed through periods of great spiritual desolation, and under-

went the agonies of soul dereliction. But Suso won his way through these perils into the calm assurance of life in God, and his days were henceforth spent in holy service of increasing fruitfulness. He was, as Vaughan points out, greatly sought after as a preacher.

A brief examination of the Book of the Eternal Wisdom, which Suso is stated to have written "only in his most favoured moments, himself ignorant and passive, but under the immediate impulse and illumination of the Divine Wisdom," will bring us face to face with the characteristic features of his mysticism; and as Suso says: "Whosoever will read these writings of mine in a right spirit, can hardly fail to be stirred in his heart's depths, either to fervent love, or to new light, or to a longing and thirsting for God, or to detestation and loathing of his sins, or to that spiritual aspiration by which the soul is renewed in grace."

The first step towards union with God is detachment from the world, a real detachment, attained only by dying to self. Speaking to his "spiritual daughter," Suso says that the order in which the spirit returns to God is, first, by completely disentangling itself from the pleasures

of the world and resolutely turning away from all vices, and in quiet and holy exercise by continual prayer to God, obtaining and maintaining the subjugation of the flesh. Quite simply, the first stage consists in turning away from the world and the lusts of the flesh, to God.

Next, one must be heartily willing to endure patiently whatsoever ills flesh is heir to, whether inflicted by God or man. The garden of spices is sprinkled with red flowers. Further, the Passion of Christ crucified must be experienced in and by our own souls; it must not be a mere imitation of the sufferings of Christ, but a mystical identification with them. In addition to this, the most holy life of our Redeemer is given for us, as our example. By a continual remembrance of this—of His gracious words and His blameless life—we shall be fashioned after the same image. Beyond this is the stage in which the soul divests itself in a profound stillness, by a purposeful resignation. Therein a man becomes dead to self—the honour of Christ and the heavenly Father has become all in all, and in this utter tranquillity of spirit, “that mystic trance through which our Momus pageantries advance,” attained through progressive

holy exercise, a man arrives at the goal in which, freed from the outward senses he parts with his "natural properties," and "presses within the circle which represents the eternal Godhead, and thus reaches spiritual perfection." This entire process has been truly and tersely described by Suso, where he says that a man of true self-abandonment must be unbuilt from the creature, inbuilt with Christ, and overbuilt into the Godhead.

In this *résumé* of Suso's teaching, there are certain things which call for some comment, perhaps even elucidation; and we do well to bear in mind continually, that "all these images, with their interpretations, are as unlike the formless truth as a black Ethiopian is to the bright sun."

The basis of all Suso's mystical teaching is the doctrine that men become sons through Christ and in Christ. Suso compares the only begotten Son to an image which is so complex and manifold, that it denotes all men. All men are members of Christ, and it is by Him alone that they either are, or may become sons. Speaking of Christ the Lord Suso affirms that He is distinguished above all men, in that

He is the Head of Christendom, which is His body. It is therefore well with a man, only when, dying to self, he begins to live in Christ. Whosoever then desires to become a son in Christ and commence the steep ascent, must with unfeigned resignation turn from himself to Christ, and "he shall come whither he ought to come." Though we have caused our Elder Brother much labour and pain, nay, for that very cause, the abyss of His mercy towards us is unfathomable.

Suso represents our Lord as saying: "No man can come to the height of my Godhead, nor attain to that unknown sweetness, unless he be first led through the bitterness of my humanity which is the road by which men must travel. My Passion is the gate through which they must enter."

Suso teaches that the soul must be prepared to suffer and endure: "Of a surety thou wilt have to endure many deaths, ere thou canst put thy nature under the yoke. . . . Many shall be thy afflictions, till thou hast finished thy grievous journey of cross-bearing, and hast renounced thy own will and disentangled thyself so completely from all creatures, in everything which

might hinder thine eternal salvation, as to be like one about to die." Again he asks: "By what other way could he who had deprived himself of joy by the insatiable pursuit of pleasure be brought back more fittingly to the joys of eternity?" We are divinely assured that, as created beings now are, no more fitting method could be found. To be alone

On the tideless seas in the middle hour
Of the savage and measureless night,

is an experience dread indeed, but it will be forgotten in the glory of the daybreak.

Suso held that the secrets of God were disclosed to men in the humanity of Christ, and that by no other means could they have been made known. Christ is the door by which a man may enter; He is our Kinsman in whom we find the source of our new life; and from Him proceeds the living energy which enables us to will and to do. This may be expressed by saying that the mystery of our own being is inextricably interwoven with His, that our destiny is linked with the travail of His soul, and that we are complete in Him. How deep is the truth that finds expression in the mystical saying, that the

door by which God issues from Himself is the door through which He enters the human soul !

On the sufferings of Christ, Suso's teaching is both full and clear. A high love, he says, loves the sufferings of Christ ; for they immoderately affect the heart. They ought not, however, to be regarded solely after an outward manner, but much more after an inward manner ; not alone by the reason in contemplative guise, but rather operatively or experimentally. In a word, they are to be apprehended by "an imitative exercise." No one more truly testifies his grief over the Saviour's Passion than he who in very deed passes through it with the Saviour, and fills up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ. Only thus does the soul share to the full in the treasure of the divine passion.

"Who," asks Suso, "would be willing to tread the way of a hard and despised life (avoided by all) if God had not trodden the same way Himself? Suppose thou wert under condemnation of death, how could any one show his love and fidelity to thee more certainly, or cause thee to love him in return more powerfully, than by bearing thy sentence himself?" Therefore, says

Suso, if there is any one who is not stirred and moved to love Christ from his heart by His exceeding love, His infinite pity, His exalted divinity, His pure humanity, His brotherly fidelity, His sweet companionship, is there aught that can soften that stony heart? Even when all is done that can be done by a man in imitation of the Saviour's most gentle life and most loving passion, no man can make himself for Christ's sake such as Christ made Himself for his.

We must not, however, understand Suso to teach that there is no virtue in the contemplation of the sufferings of Christ after an outward manner, for this would be opposed both to the spirit of His words and to the example of His life. To the one who realises the inward in the outward, the inward becomes more truly vital than it does to him who merely realises the inward in the inward; and to bear in the body the marks of the Lord Jesus is a sign that we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. But to know the essential glory of the Beloved Son, the eyes must first behold "the slain and the stricken Lamb," and on the cross of dishonour "a cursed and a dying Man." On this wise the soul is led into fellowship with the sufferings

of the Lord, and experiences the blessedness of conformity to the Divine Son.

I would bear in my body the dying
Of Him who has died for me—
Here share, O my Lord, Thy rejection
Ere I sit on Thy Throne with Thee.

In sorrow, in want, in dishonour,
How dear are Thy footsteps to me!
The fountain is sweet to the thirsty,
But sweeter is thirsting with Thee.

Above me the stars in the heavens,
Stars countless, so many they be,
So glorious, albeit so countless
The sorrows I suffer for Thee.¹

Although Suso would agree with one who writes that Horeb and Calvary and Sinai are "all peaks where man has suffer'd and has seen some little corner of the mystery," he would likewise teach (in accordance with the deepest thought of the greatest mystics), that "the Mystery of the Passion and of that Lamb which has been slain from the foundation of the world is one of the mysteries of the unseen. The true Golgotha and Calvary are not of this world." But as Suso sings, it is nevertheless true, that as

¹ *Hymns of Ter Steegen, Suso and others*, by Frances Bevan.

Thou knowest the sun by his glory—
Thou knowest the rose by her breath,
Thou knowest the fire by its glowing—
Thou knowest my Love by Death.

The soul must not shrink because it is necessary to follow the footsteps of Christ's Passion ; for the soul that loves God, and is inwardly united to Him, finds the cross itself light and easy to bear, and has nothing whereof to complain. "No one receives from Me more marvellous sweetness than He who shares My bitterest labours."

Suso represents the Eternal Wisdom speaking to the servitor thus : "Knowest thou not Me? Wherefore art thou so despondent? . . . Dost thou not know that I am Wisdom, most gentle and tender, in whom is the abyss of infinite mercy, never yet fathomed perfectly even by all the saints, but still open to thee and all other sorrowing hearts. . . . I am He who bore a bitter death, that I might restore thee to life. I am thy brother ; I am thy Bridegroom. . . . Wash away thy stains in My blood. Lift up thy head, open thine eyes and take heart. In token of reconciliation take this ring and put it on thy finger as My bride, put on this robe and these

shoes, and receive this sweet and loving name, that thou mayst both be and be called for ever My bride."

Of the ebb and flow of the tides of the spirit, Suso writes with great wisdom. Once he passed through a period of the deepest spiritual gloom—a gloom which lasted for ten years. He knows that never to be deprived of the divine presence belongs not to temporal, but to eternal life ; and that the holiest souls have to pass through times of intense spiritual desolation, and no "resignation is more perfect or more excellent than to be resigned in dereliction." It is the divine will that we should be resigned in the matter of receiving and feeling tokens of the divine love ; and we ought to seek the divine glory alone (not the gratification of ourselves) "in dryness and hardness as well as in sweetness."

The end of the mystic's path is God. Suso describes the heart's true Home in language which has been an offence to many. Dorner, for example, regards Suso as setting up "as the objective goal of man," the "deepest abyss, the dark state of utter indeterminateness, in which all manifoldness and the spirit's own selfhood disappear." But in Suso's thought it is

clear that the distinction between the Creator and the creature was preserved, however unguarded some of his expressions concerning absorption in God may have been.

The influence of Dionysius upon Suso is marked, and nowhere is it more evident than in the doctrine of "the divine dark," where the soul is described as becoming ignorant of itself and of all things, and, reduced to its essence, hovering in the abyss of the Trinity. The transit of the soul, through the mystic experiences of the inward life, to spiritual perfection, ends, it is true, in its absorption in the Eternal Godhead; yet Suso adds, that in this absorption the soul is still a creature, "but hath no thought whether it be a creature or no." "Ah, God! blessed is the man who strives after Thee alone!"

CHAPTER VIII

TAULER

JOHN TAULER, the great Dominican monk and the most distinguished of the band of godly men known as "The Friends of God"—an association "for the better tending of the inward life in these troublous times"—was born at Strassburg, of "a tolerably wealthy family," in the year 1300. At an early age he entered the Dominican convent, subsequently studying at Cologne, and afterwards at Paris at the famous college of St. Jacques. It is manifest, however, from his statements in later life, that his early studies, though of a strenuous character, did not teach him "that which answered to the needs of his spirit."

Undoubtedly, the works of the earlier mystics—especially Augustine—exercised a profound influence upon him; and in Tauler's writings Dionysius, Proclus, Bernard, and the Victorines

are all quoted or otherwise referred to. Returning from Paris to Strassburg, he came under the influence of other mystical teachers—chief of whom may be cited Eckhart—commonly regarded as “the most learned man of his day in the Aristotelian philosophy”—who left an indelible impression upon Tauler’s thought. There is a great similarity between the teaching of Eckhart and Tauler, but the latter is less scholastic and metaphysical than the former ; and, as we shall see, in his teaching upon sin he strikes a much deeper note. Nicholas of Strassburg was another mystic whose powerful and penetrating intellect, combined with a popular and persuasive gift of oratory, made a strong impression upon Tauler.

Joined to intellectual abilities of a high order, Tauler had unique gifts as a preacher, a proof of which is to be found in the crowded congregations that gathered to hear him until the close of his life. Doubtless one of the secrets of the attractiveness of his preaching is to be found in the fact that its dominant note is experimental and practical.

Tauler, who was greatly beloved by the people for his unstained nobility of character, held that no teacher can teach what he has not “lived

through himself"; and it was said of him that the spirit of God dwelt within like "a sweet harping." We do not read of visions and voices in the life of Tauler, but we feel that we are in the presence of one who has been oft on the Mount of Transfiguration with his Lord, and beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, has been changed into the same Image.

His teaching concerning the indwelling of God in the soul of man was, perhaps, the most fruitful, if not the most distinctive feature of his doctrine. God is, indeed, everywhere, but it is in the depths of the soul that He may always be found. The divine kingdom, he says, is seated in the inmost recesses of the spirit. Accordingly, the soul, which is the noblest of creatures, is enabled to find, to know, and to love God. Men are counselled therefore to be at home in their own hearts, and to cease from their restless chase of and search after outward things, to turn their thoughts inward, to remain resting on "the inmost foundation of their souls," and with the eye of their enlightened understanding fixed upon God, await the divine summons.

Tauler speaks much of the wild waste, or the

wilderness through which exercised spirits must needs pass before they can really hear or understand that which is within them, and the communications that God makes to the waiting soul. Here is given an exceeding bitter myrrh to drink, yet, "when a man is willing to taste this myrrh, and does not put it from him, it wears down flesh and blood, yea, the whole nature; for these inward exercises make the cheek grow pale far sooner than great outward hardships, for God appoints unto His servants cruel fightings and strange dread, and unheard-of distresses, which none can understand but he who has felt them. And these men are beset with such a variety of difficulties, so many cups of bitterness are presented to them, that they hardly know which way to turn, or what they ought to do; but God knows right well what He is about." God gives to the soul the cup of myrrh in a love surpassing all that the heart of man can conceive.

When on the aspirations of the heart
A darkness falls and, all her aids withdrawn,
No comfort comes to cheer thy lonely soul,
God is not with thee less in dark than light,
And in aridity and drought discern
His ministry and thy best way to Him!

"CUPS OF BITTERNESS"

99

A little while He leaves thee, to return
In fuller sweetness—ah, He leaves thee not!
His consolation, not His ward or watch,
Withdraws awhile, and thus He leads thee on,
That thou through dereliction and great pain
Mayest pass forth into felicity.
God waits behind the darkness of thy soul,
As waits the sun to gladden earth and sea,
And bitter winds possessing all the East
Can hinder not nor darkness bar the way.

Tauler himself had passed through this, and he speaks out of the depths of a rich, albeit desolating spiritual experience. The souls that undergo and pass through it—not unscathed—become masters of the spiritual life, and are able to lead others to the unsullied heights of joy they themselves have attained.

It is by this dark and awesome way that the soul comes to the joy and blessedness, the glory and honour of those who shall see clearly and without veil the gladsome and beauteous face of God, and shares in the best and highest good which is God Himself. But sore, indeed, is the desolation of this darkness illumined by no candle of the Lord, made radiant by no vision—the silence unbroken by any voice from heaven. Yet it is in the midst of this wilderness

that the lilies of chastity, the white roses of innocence, the violets of humility grow side by side with the red roses of sacrifice and "many other fair flowers and wholesome roots"; and in traversing this unalluring way the soul is prepared by God for Himself.

Of the abiding presence and continual work of God in the souls of those with whom He holds immediate converse, no man can adequately speak. It can only be dimly suggested to another. He alone who has experienced it knows what it is, and can say nothing more of it than that "God in very truth hath possessed the ground of his soul." Always on man's part there must be deep humility, free self-surrender, patient long-suffering, true poorness of spirit and fervent love to God. Tauler entreats us to pray for the true divine love which may unite the soul with God, and immerse and cover it in Him. The essence of such prayer is "the ascent of the mind to God."

Tauler feels acutely the sinfulness of sin, and he answers the poignant cry of the sin-burdened soul, "who shall deliver me?" by the apostolic word, "I thank God . . . Jesus

Christ our Lord." It was this feature of his teaching, doubtless, that prompted Luther to write of Tauler's sermons that neither in Latin nor in his own language had he ever seen a theology more sound or more in harmony with the Gospel.

Tauler had known the grace of God in Christ, and he firmly believed in that divine loving-kindness which goes far out beyond our dreams. "O child, hast thou fallen? Then arise, and with childlike trust go to thy father, like the prodigal son, and with humility say with heart and voice, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.' And what will thy Heavenly Father do but what the father in the parable did? Assuredly He will not change His nature, which is Love, on account of thy misdeeds."

Of the identification of the spiritual man with the crucified Jesus, Tauler speaks as follows: "The holy apostle Paul, whose endeavours towards a perfect life were all founded upon endurance and true renunciation, shows how a righteous and spiritual man, being crucified with Christ on the Cross, no longer liveth through

himself, albeit his sufferings bring forth in him the living fruits of the Spirit."

Further, Tauler goes on to say: "Though there are many kinds of cross and suffering, of which each has its own length and depth and breadth and height, yet there is only one on which our eternal redemption was accomplished—that is, the cross of Christ's humanity, which again points to a still higher Cross (in a manner without cross and pain) of His Divine nature."

Tauler had sorrowed greatly on account of his sins, and with agony of spirit had prayed: "O merciful God, have mercy upon me, a poor sinner; have mercy in Thine infinite compassion, for I am not worthy to live on the face of the earth." Such an "unworthy sinful man" would not be likely to regard sin lightly. But he knew Christ as the sinful soul's Saviour, and all his sins, like his thoughts and his cares, were lovingly cast upon the One Sure Refuge. He knew that salvation was the absolute and free gift of God's grace, that we are reconciled to God by the death of His dear Son; and the comfort of "the bitter passion and death of Jesus Christ, who had therewith made satisfaction before God . . . for the sins of the

whole world," brought to his heart the peace that passeth all understanding.

Tauler's teaching concerning the Christian's imitation of Christ is insistent and unmistakable. He bids us turn to Christ with reverent and expectant spirit. Thereafter, we must gaze both closely and deeply into the glorious image of our Lord Jesus Christ, maintaining a continual earnest effort and aspiration after it. Then looking attentively at ourselves, beholding our own littleness, we shall see how unlike we are to this image. The imitation of Christ is not effected by talking much and eloquently of the Incarnation and bitter sufferings of Christ, by presenting Him to our imagination as He trod the wine-press alone, although such things may move the sensibilities of dull hearts. But in such excitement and transport and "mere sweet emotion" there is often more of sense and self-pleasing than of true love to God. We must become like unto Christ by perfect obedience, and by perseverance and growth of holiness follow "the lovely example" of our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ to our life's end. The righteous spiritual man is nailed with Christ to the cross, "whose sufferings bring forth in him the living fruits

of the Spirit." Such a man dies to self-will, self-complacency, and other sinful failings; for, says Tauler, he who will reach up unto the Cross of Christ's divine nature, must first be fashioned into the likeness of His crucifixion in the flesh. Thus, in all things, "the sacred example and sufferings of our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ" and "nothing of our own," are to be our stay. The life of Christ is left "as a sacred Testament to His followers in this present time, who are converted into His dying life, that they may remember Him when they drink of His cup, and walk as He hath walked."

Now, some of us fill'd with a holy fire
The Cross and the Christ have kiss'd;
We have sworn to achieve our soul's desire
On book and evangelist.¹

The soul that has once tasted the heavenly manna knows that the garbage of the world can never again satisfy, and nothing can ever separate the redeemed and restored spirit from the Lord of life and glory.

I cannot lose the presence of the Lord:
One arm, Humility, takes hold upon

¹ A. E. Waite, *Strange Houses of Sleep*.

His dear Humanity ; the other, Love,
Clasps His Divinity. So where I go,
He goes ; and better fire-walled Hell with Him
Than golden-gated Paradise without.¹

It is not difficult to see how Tauler's "profound spiritual self-abasement," as it is termed by Vaughan, led to his "doctrine of self-abandonment," or, otherwise expressed, how his conception of the Quest and Way determined his idea of the End or Goal. Regarding sin as selfishness, perfect righteousness or holiness was the denial and complete effacement of self. Thus Tauler speaks of a man flinging himself into the divine abyss, in which he dwelt eternally before he was created. Tauler held that it is possible for a man to be carried so far that his spirit is, as it were, sunk and lost in the abyss of the Deity, completely freed from the consciousness of all creature distinctions. He says : "All things are gathered together in one with the divine sweetness, and the man's being is so penetrated with the divine substance, that he loses himself therein, as a drop of water is lost in a cask of strong wine." Elsewhere, he says that when God finds the man thus simply

¹ J. G. Whittier, *Tauler*,

and nakedly turned towards Him, the Godhead bends down and descends into the depths of the pure, waiting soul, and transforms the created soul, drawing it up into the uncreated essence, so that the spirit becomes one with Him. If it be asked : "What remains after a man hath lost himself in God?" Tauler answers: "Nothing but a fathomless annihilation of himself, an absolute ignoring of all reference to himself personally, of all aims of his own in will and heart, in way, in purpose and in use." Tauler does not hesitate to affirm that the man's spirit becomes so sunk in God, in Divine union, that he loses all sense of distinction, "and there remains a secret, still union, without cloud or colour." Thus God is "the unity in which all multiplicity is transcended." By divine grace, every soul may thus give place to God; only, it "is not the work of a day or a year." "Be not discouraged; it takes time, and requires simplicity, purity, and self-surrender"; and the three stages of the mystic ascent "are the shortest road to it."

"Because the soul is a creature," says Tauler, "it must cast itself out of itself, and in its hour of contemplation must cast out all saints and

angels, because these are creatures and hinder the union of the soul with God. It must be rid of all things, in need of nothing, that it may come to God in His likeness; for nothing unites so much as likeness, and receives its colour so soon. God will then give Himself to the faculties of the soul, so that the soul grows in the likeness of God and takes His colour. The image resides in the soul's powers, the likeness in its virtues, and the Divine colour in its union. Thus its union becomes so intimate that it does not work its works in its creature form, but in its Divine form, wherein it is united to God. Its very works are taken from it, and God works all its works in His form. Finally, while it beholds God and becomes more intimately united with Him, the union is of such a nature that God empties Himself altogether into it, and draws it so completely into Himself that it no longer has any distinct recognition of virtue or vice, or of the marks by which it knows what it is itself.”

CHAPTER IX

ST. TERESA¹

ST. TERESA was born in the year 1515, and died after a most beneficent life, aged sixty-seven. She was canonised at Rome in 1622. As Dr. Whyte in his noble appreciation of the saint rightly says: "Teresa's was one of those sovereign souls that are born from time to time as if to show us what our race was created for at first, and for what it is still destined. She was a queen among women." Of her sanctified energy, extraordinary tact, of her practical, as well as mystical wisdom, it is impossible to speak too highly. The consummate ability with which she organised the numerous communities of barefooted Carmelites testifies to "her powers as an organiser and ruler of men and women." Doubtless she owed much of her natural nobility of

¹ The translations of St. Teresa's writings by Woodhead, Lewis, and Dalton may be warmly commended to the reader.

character to her Castilian ancestors, but the consistent self-denial of her life was due to her strenuous and unintermittent cultivation of the graces of the consecrated soul, and her "complete conformity to the will of God."

As Dr. Inge has pointed out, Teresa is best known as a visionary, but although many visions were granted to her during the early years spent in the convent, there was a long period in which they were absent. She experienced them again between the ages of forty and fifty, and despite their vivid reality, there were times when she felt uncertain as to their character and import.

The first heavenly rapture which shook her soul came to her when in the act of reciting the *Veni Creator*, when, in the interior of her heart, she heard these thrilling words spoken: "I will have thee hold converse, not with men, but angels." In her autobiography, which she wrote in 1562, "at the bidding of her confessor," she tells us that the reading of *St. Augustine's Confessions* at the age of forty-one "was the turning point in her life." As she read, "it was just as if the Lord called" her. These calls or "locutions" of the divine which she heard in her visions were remarkable. She describes

them herself with perfect calmness, saying, that the words were very clearly formed and unmistakable, though not heard by the bodily ear. "They are quite unlike the words framed by the imagination, which are muffled."

There is no escape, she tells us, in this "locution" of God addressed to the soul, for in spite of ourselves we must listen. She has visions of Christ also, in which she sees Him not with the eyes of the body, but with the eyes of the soul. She beholds him more distinctly than would have been possible with the eyes of the body. One such occasion she describes on this wise: "Being one day in prayer, our Lord was pleased to show me His sacred hand, of excessive and indescribable beauty; afterwards His Divine face, and finally, at mass, all His most sacred humanity."

Her practice of mental prayer, with its "quiet extraordinary purity and spirituality," is a deeply significant feature of her life. "With Teresa," says Dr. Whyte, "literally all things were sanctified, and sweetened, and made fruitful by prayer."

She says herself that the soul which begins to walk in the way of mental prayer with

resolution, and is determined not to care much, neither to rejoice nor to be greatly afflicted whether sweetness and tenderness be denied or granted by our Lord, has already travelled a great part of the way. In fact, Teresa's conception of prayer is so far-reaching and comprehensive that it becomes practically identified with the whole domain of mystical theology.

In prayer, we resign our souls into the hands of God; Teresa mourns that we are so long and so slow in thus giving up our hearts to God. "If, however," she says, "we did what we could, not clinging with our hearts to anything whatsoever in this world, but having our treasure and our conversation in heaven, then this blessedness would soon be ours, as all Thy saints testify. God never withholds himself from him who pays this price and who perseveres in seeking Him. He will, little by little, and now and then, strengthen and restore that soul, till at last it is victorious." That prayer alone is effectual which is offered by a soul resolved to follow the Eternal Good—by that soul which is willing to forsake all for God. Teresa confesses that all her failures in obedience were the consequence of not leaning on the strong pillar of prayer. Her practice of

mental prayer, which from her twenty-fourth year onwards she adopted, led her into the realm of those higher spiritual experiences which are the fruits of "supernatural prayer and mystical devotion."

According to St. Teresa there are four degrees of prayer. She names the first degree simple mental prayer. In this, the one who prays is bidden frequently to pause and think with whom he speaks; to call to mind his own sinfulness; and to set before himself the goal to which he aspires.

Teresa writes: "In prayer it is far best to be alone, as, for our example and instruction, our Lord always was when He prayed. We cannot talk both to God and man at the same time; and if we feel too much alone, and must have companionship, no companionship is comparable to that of Christ. Let us picture and represent Christ to ourselves and to His Father as always at our side. Those who pray with proper preparation—with much meditation on the whole life and death of our Lord, on their own death, on the last day, or such like—our Lord will bring all such to the Port of Light." . . . "The life of prayer is simply love to God and the custom

of being ever with Him." Of the obtaining of God's presence in the praying soul, she says: "We obtain it by meditating much upon our own baseness, our neglect and ingratitude shown toward the Son of God, what things He has done for us, His Passion and terrible suffering,—His whole life so full of affliction, and by delighting ourselves in His word and in His works, and such things as these." Such mental prayer ought to be practised by all men, and it is the beginning of all virtues.

The second degree is called the prayer of quiet, and it is supernatural. In this the will is absorbed and taken up in God. In a passive and tranquil condition the soul often receives wondrous sweetness. The soul burns with love without knowing what she has done either to deserve, or to prepare herself for such rapture. It is the gift of God, and He gives His gifts to whomsoever and whensoever He will.

The third degree, or the prayer of union, indicates the stage at which the powers of will, understanding and memory are quiescent, and swallowed up in God. It is the prayer of perfect contemplation. At such seasons God works in the soul that which far transcends and overtops

all the powers and resources even of the renewed nature. Teresa adds that such prayer is not necessary to salvation.

The last degree of all is the prayer of ecstasy. This stage is the rarest and most privileged of all. In this all the natural powers "are sunk in a divine stupor." The ecstasy never lasts very long—rarely, indeed, half an hour. Teresa is careful and sane enough to add that we must come out from the sweetest and most rapturous prayer, only to do harder and still harder works for God and our neighbour. "For my part," she says, "I desire no other gift of prayer but that which ends in every day making me a better and better woman."

Again Teresa writes in a letter to Father Gratian: "It is important to remember, regarding these interior things of the Spirit, that the best prayer and that which is most acceptable to God, is that which produces the best results. I do not speak now of the many desires which the soul may have, for although these are good, they are not always such as our self-love represents them. I speak of these results which are confirmed by actions. In this way we may know what desires the soul has for God's honour, by her true anxiety for it, and by her diligence in

employing her memory and understanding in everything that may please Him, that so she may the better testify her love for Him."

The mysticism of St. Teresa is largely that of the quietist. Although she does not adopt the familiar three-stage mystic ascent, yet the Initiation, the Quest, and the Way are all to be found in her exposition of the mystic's progress which is described in *The Interior Castle*. There are seven apartments in the Castle; the innermost chamber represents the centre of the soul, where God dwells; the remaining divisions from the outermost to the central, represent "the advancing stages of discipline and privilege through which the mystic passes."

Ere the soul can return to the bosom of God it must cut itself away from all earthly and sensuous things, withdrawing itself from all worldly objects, and by stern discipline fit itself for the holy quest. The most Sacred Humanity of Christ, however, is not to be counted among the objects from which we have to withdraw.

On the contrary, Teresa insists that the soul may place itself in the presence of Christ and accustom itself to many acts of love directed to His Sacred Humanity, and remain in His

presence continually, and speak to Him, pray to Him in its necessities, and complain to Him of its troubles; be merry with Him in its joys, and yet not forget Him because of them.

Teresa's spiritual instructions and directions prove, not only her knowledge of the mystic way, but her insight into the perversity of the human will and the sinfulness of the human heart.

As M. Huysmans truly observes: "She is the geographer and hydrographer of the sinful soul. She has drawn the map of its poles, marked its latitudes of contemplation and prayer, and laid out all the interior seas and lands of the human heart. Other saints have been among those heights and depths and deserts before her, but no one has left us so methodical and so scientific a survey."

After the soul has passed through the stages of detachment, of purgation and discipline, the way is opened up to the higher forms of contemplation. There are many roads leading to the many mansions of heaven, but they are all beset by strange and sharp spiritual vicissitudes; but the one thing needful is to abandon ourselves into the hands of God. We are to think "that in the whole world there is only God and our souls," and the human will must become so conformed

to the divine "that without knowing how it has become a captive, it gives a simple consent to become the prisoner of God, for it knows well what it is to be the captive of Him it loves." There are seasons of dryness during which the soul endures all the miseries of despair, and there are seasons of rapture, albeit often accompanied by a certain "great pain," in which the enraptured soul is, as it were, crucified between earth and heaven, enduring its passion. But, as Teresa points out, "the agony carries with it so great a joy that I know of nothing wherewith to compare it. It is a sharp martyrdom, full of sweetness: for if any earthly thing be then offered to the soul, even though it may be that which it habitually found most sweet, the soul will have none of it." The will becomes at last perfectly passive, and the exercised soul at rest. Even the understanding ceases from its normal acts and operations, because, in mystical theology, "God suspends it," when He discloses Himself and His ways to the loved and loving soul.

In St. Teresa's *Way of Perfection*—a work of her ripest spiritual genius—we have what Mrs. Cunningham Graham calls "her spiritual testament," and in this book "the maladies of the

soul " and its wounds, its sins and its weaknesses as well as the Source of its recovery and life, the divine manifestations with which it is visited on its upward ascent are all treated of with consummate skill and great power. In all her writing she shows herself as a sure guide to the troubled soul; she knows the way because she has trodden it. Hear her as she cries, " Oh, what a distress it is for my soul to have to return to hold commerce with this world after having had its conversation in heaven! To have to play a part in the sad farce of this earthly life! . . . I cannot run away from this world, I must remain in it till my discharge comes. But, meantime, how keen is my captivity; how wretched in my own soul am I! And one of my worst distresses is this, that I am alone in my exile."

Teresa's teaching on the indwelling of Christ in the human soul is full of suggestiveness. He is the very Soul of the soul. He engulfs into Himself, He enlightens and strengthens the soul. In a beautiful passage, Teresa speaks of a great and wonderful palace in the soul, with its structure all of gold and precious stones. In this palace the Great King is the guest. He sits on the innermost seat of the heart, and

holds it to be His best and bravest throne. This will seem to some, she says, a silly fiction ; but yet to believe it, fiction as it is, will help the soul much. They are happy people who have once got a hold of this glorious truth. To possess, throughout this long and uphill pilgrimage of ours, the constant presence of our great Exemplar Jesus Christ is to be fortified against all the powers of evil.

No company is comparable to the company of Christ. Teresa describes, in a pictorial manner, a vision of Christ's indwelling in her soul, in the following words : " One day, my soul suddenly lapsed into a state of recollection, appearing to me as a bright mirror, the whole of which was perfectly clear. In the centre of this was represented to me Christ our Lord, as I am accustomed to see Him. I seemed to see Him in all the parts of my soul also, clearly as in a mirror, and at the same time (I know not how to express it), this mirror was all engraven in the Lord Himself, by a communication exceedingly loving, and which I cannot describe. I know that this vision was of great advantage to me, both then and every time I have called it to mind—more especially after communion.

I was given to understand that when a soul is in mortal sin, this mirror is covered with a great cloud, and grows very dark, so that the Lord can neither be seen nor represented in us, though He is always present as the Author of our being." The divine indwelling, Teresa affirms, is the secret of victory over the vain things of this world, of deliverance from the manifold lusts that war against the soul, and of all progress towards the Port of Light.

In the higher stages of Mystical Theology, Teresa speaks of the experiencing of divine truths by supernatural illumination, such illumination taking place when the soul is in a condition of perfect passivity. Writing in her autobiography of such an experience, she says, "I learnt some things without the help of words, and that more clearly than those things which were told me in words. I understood exceedingly deep truths concerning the Truth, more than I could have done through the teaching of many learned men." Crashaw speaks of the saint's "angelical height of speculation"; and a great multitude of humble hearts, whose flame of love has been kindled at the same altar on which "Teresa of Jesus" laid down her life, would acknowledge the immense

profit and delight they have found in aspiring with her after the highest things that mind and soul can attain.

O sweet incendiary ! shew here thy art
 Upon this carcass of a cold hard heart ;
 Let all thy scatter'd shafts of light that play
 Among the leaves of thy large books of day,
 Combined against this breast at once break in
 And take away from me myself and sin ;
 This gracious robbery shall thy bounty be,
 And thy best fortune such fair spoils of me.
 O thou undaunted daughter of desires !
 By all thy dower of lights and fires ;
 By all the eagle in thee, all the dove ;
 By all thy lives and deaths of love ;
 By thy large draughts of intellectual day,
 And all thy thirsts of love more large than they
 By all thy brim-filled bowls of fierce desire ;
 By thy last morning's draught of liquid fire ;
 By the full kingdom of that final kiss
 That seized thy parting soul, and sealed thee His ;
 By all the heavens thou hast in Him,
 (Fair sister of the Seraphim !) ;
 By all of Him we have in thee,
 Leave nothing of myself in me :
 Let me so read thy life, that I
 Unto all life of mine may die.¹

¹ Crashaw, *The Flaming Heart*.

CHAPTER X

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS¹

DR. INGE has written of St. John of the Cross that he "presents the life of holiness in a grim and repellent aspect." Many students of mysticism will, however, regard this as a mischievous misstatement—only possible to one who has little or no sympathy with the ascetic austerities which St. John practised so unremittently. His writings display a similar Quietistic tendency to that which was characteristic of St. Teresa, though John's turbulent and fiery disposition is in marked contrast to Teresa's. "It is impossible," writes Vaughan, "not to recognise a certain grandeur in such a man. Miserably mistaken as he was, he is genuine throughout as mystic and ascetic. Every bitter cup he would press to the lips of others he had first drained himself." Further, Vaughan even

¹ An admirable translation of the works of St. John of the Cross is that by David Lewis.

admits "it must be conceded that the mysticism of John takes the very highest ground. It looks almost with contempt upon the phantoms, the caresses, the theurgic toys of grosser mystics."

In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Obscure Night of the Soul*, which he finished in the convent of Pegnuela, St. John of the Cross describes the mystic pathway to union with God, with the unerring certainty of one to whom the inner way is familiar ground. "The journey of the soul to the Divine union," says St. John, "is called night for three reasons: the point of departure is privation of all desire, and complete detachment from the world; the road is by faith, which is like night to the intellect; the Goal, which is God, is incomprehensible while we are in this life."

St. John passed through the obscure night, and he is a sure guide to all those who are starting out on the same divine quest. He is a true hierophant to the spiritually perplexed, a real unfolders of divine mysteries to exercised wayfarers.

What may be called the central principle of St. John's teaching is that of complete detachment from the things of the world. Unless the

soul cuts itself away from these, the mystic ascent is an impossible ideal. He says expressly, that in order to unite ourselves to the Infinite we must surrender finite things without reserve. It is not possible that created things should serve as a ladder to the Uncreated Source of all—they are only a hindrance and a snare, and the moment the soul attempts to rest in them it ceases to advance towards the Infinite. When the soul begins to dwell upon anything, it ceases to cast itself upon the All.

Wise therefore, and wise above all, is he who does not
swerve aside,

But knows to his greatest need on earth is service of earth
denied ;

Who least things asking of flesh and blood and less than
the least of rest,

Goes on demanding the greater good and disdaining the
second best.

If we empty our spirit of all created things, we shall then walk in the divine light, for God bears no resemblance to any created thing. The soul must go forth, abandoning itself in pure faith to darkness. This world is "beyond the shadow of a dream," and the mystic presses onward towards the great reality.

First, the soul must pass through the obscure

night of the sense, an experience which comes to many. The neophyte may mark this by the absence of inclination towards any created thing. It is a process in which vigil and purgation fulfil their perfect work accompanied with much painfulness and weariness. It often succeeds a period of spiritual luxury and gratification, and is frequently characterized by anxiety lest the soul should be turning back from God. Often there is an apparently unaccountable incapacity for meditation which tortures and torments the soul. Yet at times the soul is visited by wondrous raptures and delights, enjoying even now a foretaste of those pleasures which are for evermore.

The second stage is the night of the spirit, which only falls upon those souls that have made assured progress amid spiritual things. St. John warns his readers that few persons are willing to endure, even for the greatest end, the least spiritual solicitude and mortification, and still fewer who resolve to labour with firm patience till they attain the Goal of all human endeavour. During this second night the purification of the spirit takes place—a purgation which is vital to the spirit. In this

our desires after spiritual goods often expire, and all our feelings become "barren and restrained." At this time "the deserted soul cannot think, or pray, or praise as of old," and it begins to fear that "pitiless purgation and privation absolute are about to make the second night not night only, but midnight." Sometimes the soul is misled by vain visions and lying voices, but at other times it is kindled by heavenly manifestations and experiences an influx of God. "Infused contemplation or mystical theology," as St. John terms it, is a distinguishing feature of this state. Wondrous visions and beatific manifestations visit and enlighten the soul, inflaming it with "a passion of divine love." Light begins to gleam with something of the brilliance of the perfect day. We see the glow of a rosy dawn. The thick and heavy clouds that oppress the soul, confining it and keeping it alien and separate from God, flee away.

But ask not that joy be with you;
Light things are by joy express'd:
Unto us the deeps are speaking,
Past the sadness of their seeking
Is God's graveness and God's rest.¹

¹ A. E. Waite, *Strange Houses of Sleep*.

We are not to place an undue emphasis or reliance even on the visions and manifestations vouchsafed to us; for, says St. John, the higher we attain, "the less of such manifestation" do we meet. He gives an impressive warning against "the Epicureans, who seek the delight of the spirit rather than true devotion." Our duty is to press forward to the prize of our high calling of God, heedless of divine favours given or withheld. Certainly on no account are we to seek them.

The third stage is the night of the memory and the will, to which not many attain. Here the soul is enswathed in "a limitless expanse of calm"; the will "has gone out of itself, and become in a sort divine"; it now "sinks into profound oblivion." The mystic now becomes the possessor of the highest mystical wisdom, and attains a knowledge of "things so sublime that their proper idiom is for them to be perceived, felt, and wrapped in silence." He passes from this oblivion into a supernatural state, in which his powers are transformed into divine activities. His going forth into the divine dark has crowned him with happiness, for he has been "straightway elevated to operations entirely

divine—to most familiar intercourse with God.” His understanding, once wrapped in darkness, “has passed from a human to a divine condition.” From the night of his spirit and his natural powers he has been delivered into the uncreated light.

The following is Mr. David Lewis’s translation of *The Song of the Obscure Night*, by St. John of the Cross :

In an obscure night !
With anxious love inflamed,
O happy lot !
Forth unobserved I went,
My house being now at rest.

In darkness and obscurity,
By the secret ladder disguised,
O happy lot !
In darkness and concealment,
My house being now at rest.

In that happy night,
In secret, seen of none,
Seeing nought myself,
Without other light or guide,
Save that which in my heart was burning.

That light guided me,
More surely than the noonday sun,
To the place where He was waiting for me,
Whom I knew well,
And where none but He appeared.

O guiding night!
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night, that hast united
The Lover with His beloved!
And changed her into her Love.

On my flowery bosom,
Kept whole for Him alone,
He reposed and slept.
I kept Him, and the wooing
Of the cedars fanned Him.

Then His hair floated in the breeze
That blew from the turret.
He struck me on the neck
With his gentle hand,
And all sensation left me.

I continued in oblivion lost.
My head was resting on my Love.
I fainted, and was abandoned,
And, amid the lilies forgotten,
Threw all my cares away.

As in the night of the spirit, all the mystic's powers and affections were renovated by "the despoliation of the old man" to such a degree that their very nature seemed changed so that they relished only spiritual and divine delights, so now, in the night of the memory and the will, the mystic's energies are changed into the Divine. Having lost entirely human knowledge and

human feelings, the mystic receives divine knowledge and divine feelings. Of this state St. John writes : " One might say, in a sense, that the soul gives God to God, for she gives to God all that she receives of God, and He gives Himself to her. This is the mystical love-gift, wherewith the soul repayeth all her debt."

O Love of all ! for love of thine and thee,
 Yet only love us, and in love like thine,
 Our soul's love-flaming shall be meet to hold—
 O love beyond all love ! the love of thee.

Without the love of God, union with God is impossible. No man can ignore and despise the world and take up his heavy and cruel cross, unless the love of God hath been shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost. Unless the soul has a love of God which constrains her, she cannot abandon whatsoever is pleasant, and embrace whatsoever is painful. No spiritual achievement is possible apart from love. " Love," says St. John, " unites the soul to God, and the more degrees of love the soul holds, so much the more deeply does it enter into God, and is concentrated into Him." By love, the soul finds its way back to its centre, and " we call that the soul's deepest centre which is the furthest goal

to which its essence, virtue, and power of movement and operation can reach ; and this centre is God."

The following words sufficiently indicate the love which St. John of the Cross bore to his Lord :

" O sweetest love of God, too little known ; he who has found Thee is at rest ; let everything be changed, O God, that we may rest in Thee. Everywhere with Thee, O my God, everywhere all things with Thee ; as I wish, O my Love, all for Thee, nothing for me—nothing for me, everything for Thee. All sweetness and delight for Thee, none for me—all bitterness and trouble for me, none for Thee. O my God, how sweet to me Thy presence, Who art the Supreme Good ! "

CHAPTER XI

JACOB BEHMEN¹

"I AM an instrument of God," writes Jacob Behmen, "wherewith He doth what He will." Certainly no one acquainted with the *Aurora* or the *Signatura Rerum*, *The Three Principles* or the *Threefold Life of Man*, *The Way to Christ* and the *Forty Questions*, the *Four Complexions* and the *Mysterium Magnum*, not to speak of the fragmentary *Theosopia*, will question for a moment the truth of Behmen's own statement.

Born in the year 1575, he became a shoemaker and glover in Görlitz. The gravity and thoughtfulness of his early days deepened with the dawn of manhood, accentuated, no doubt, by the lamentable state of things existing around him in Church and society. He was not a lettered man, and did not begin to write until within twelve years of his death. But despite his lack of

¹ *Thoughts on the Spiritual Life*, by Jacob Behmen, translated by Miss Rainy, is a small, but well-chosen selection of passages from Behmen's writings.

education, and the strong influence which his patient study of Paracelsus exerted over his naturally obscure style, no competent and sympathetic reader of his writings can doubt the stupidity and perversity of the verdict of John Wesley, who sums up Behmen's work as "sublime nonsense, inimitable bombast, fustian not to be paralleled." Saint-Martin says the right word when he speaks of Behmen as "this incomparable author."

Behmen possessed a natural genius for the great problems of philosophy and theology, and no student will be inclined to dispute what Henry More called "the sagacity of his imagination." But the secret of the profundity and insight of Behmen's writings is to be found in his own words: "the truth of God did burn in my bones till I took pen and ink and began to set down what I had seen." He also affirmed that when the Spirit of God was taken away from him he could not even read, so as to understand, what he had himself written. Without minimising the influence of the astrological and theosophic books which he confesses to have studied, and making due acknowledgment of his spiritual and mental indebtedness to Schwenkfeld and Weigel, we

are compelled to believe Behmen when he states expressly that, being divinely illumined, he was constrained to write the record of his visions.

At the age of twenty-five, as he sat meditating in his little room at Görlitz, Behmen had a vision of the origin and principles of the Divine and universal process. This first illumination, he says, came to him as he was gazing on the bright light which was reflected from a tin vessel, as the brilliant rays of the sun flashed into his room. His first impulse was to distrust the import and significance of the vision, and he attempted to dispel it, but without effect. It was not till twelve years afterwards, and when he had experienced a second illumination, which revealed with greater certainty and fulness the truths he had previously seen, that he began to write the *Aurora*.

In this vision he says that he saw the Being of all beings, the Ground and the Abyss, the birth of the Holy Trinity, the origin and first state of this world and of all created things. In himself he saw the divine or angelic world, the dark world or the original of nature, and the external or visible world as a creation out of the two inner or spiritual worlds. He saw the

whole Being in good and evil, their origin in each other, all of which moved him to great wonder and joy. But though he saw it well, as in a great deep, in his inward man, yet he could not unfold it. From time to time, however, it opened itself within him, like a growing plant. For twelve years he carried it about within him, feeling a strong inward impulse, unable to bring it forth in any outward form. At length it fell upon him, like a bursting shower, and all that he could bring into outwardness, that he wrote down.

Behmen says explicitly that he did not write from books, from the doctrine and science of men, but from the book which was opened within him—namely, the book of the glorious image of God. This book was opened for him to read, and therein did he study. It had but three leaves, the three principles of Eternity, yet in them he found the foundation of the world and all mystery. To one who lived, as did Behmen, “in weakness and childhood, and the simplicity of Christ,” we need not marvel that the gate of the Divine Mystery was at times so opened to him that in one quarter of an hour he saw and knew more than if he had been many years

together at a university. "Jacob Behmen," says Dr. Whyte, "is of the race of the seers, and he stands out a very prince among them." It is to be regretted that the fruitful influence of Behmenism on the religious thought of England—penetrating and beneficent as it was—has not, as yet, been adequately recognised and appraised. The testimony of William Law, perhaps the ablest of all Behmen's expositors, is given in the following words: "Next to the Scriptures, my only book is the illuminated Behmen. For the whole kingdom of grace and nature was opened in him. In reading Behmen I am always at home, and kept close to the kingdom of God that is within me."

The following lines of Tennyson may very fitly be used to express what was a central fact to Jacob Behmen, and indeed to all who have walked "the interior way":

If thou would'st hear the Nameless, and descend
Into the Temple-cave of thine own self,
There, brooding by the central altar, thou
May'st haply learn the Nameless hath a voice,
By which thou wilt abide, if thou be wise;
For knowledge is the swallow on the lake,
That sees and stirs the surface-shadow there
But never yet hath dipt into the Abyss.

The deep teaching and illuminating doctrine of Behmen is the outcome of the vivid revelations, experiences, and exercises through which he had passed. In it are blended the subjective, the speculative, and the symbolic types of mysticism in a very remarkable way. On all the high themes of which he treats, Behmen displays the lofty sweep of his imagination, but nowhere with greater insight than when he deals "specially of man and his soul." What has been called "the pith and drift of all Behmen's writings" is the fact of regeneration or the New Birth, of which he writes in *The Three-fold Life of Man*. This new birth which the soul needeth, he says, is "a turning towards God, and an entering into Him." This is the stone of the philosophers, and it will not be found in the ways of strife or of earthly wisdom. Everything depends on the will, and not on the understanding. We must forsake all that is earthly, and cast all our sins by which we are led captive away into the mercy of God. We are to flee to God for our freedom and for the enlightening of His Spirit. Behmen bids us not discuss much, but contend earnestly, for heaven must be stormed and hell must tremble.

With sacred vehemence we must commit our will and imagination eternally to God. Thus shall we experience wonders. Speedily shall we find One within us, who will help us to struggle, to fight, and to pray.

So we find Behmen writing: "Even as light possesseth a property other than fire, and giveth itself up, not as fire that consumeth itself, so the holy life of humility blossometh out of death when self-will dies, and the loving will of God alone reigneth and worketh in all." Love in its strength and virtue, in its height and greatness, cannot be grasped, says Behmen, without the death of the will. "If thou desirest to grasp her, she will flee from thee, but if thou givest thyself entirely and utterly to her, thy will shall become as dead, and love will then become the life of thy nature. Then thou shalt live not to thy own will, but to her will, for thy will shall become her will. Then, being as it were dead to thyself, thou shalt live to God."

Elsewhere, Behmen says we may set our "left-hand will" to the pursuit of our daily calling, but our "right-hand will" must be directed towards God and the Eternal. We are to re-

member that we are but day-labourers, and as those who listen for the voice that shall call us home.

The greatest and the most important thing is to give ourselves utterly to Christ, to place everything at His disposal. If we possess Him, He will teach us what to forsake and what to discourage, and wisdom will be given us, and He will work in us that which is well pleasing in His sight. There is one book which we all possess that leadeth to God. Every man has it in himself. It is the dear name of God, and its letters are the flames of love which He has revealed to us in the blessed name of Jesus. To ponder these same letters in your heart and spirit is enough. To be born again into the life and spirit of Christ is to possess all God is and can be. The New Birth is a divine life, derived from Christ who is the true Vine; to experience this is to have "the new life in Christ Jesus."

Behmen's teaching on the indwelling of Christ in us is singularly rich and full. Behmen believes most fervently that "there is no grace whereby we can come to adoption, save simply in the blood and death of Christ," and that "Holy

Scripture everywhere testifieth that we are justified from sin, not by meritorious works of ours, but through the blood and death of Christ"; but, at the same time, he lays great stress on "the inward power of Christ's death." He affirms that no man is a Christian who simply comforts himself with the suffering, death, and satisfaction of Christ, imputing it to himself as a gift of favour, and still remains a wild beast and unregenerate. No show of grace imputed from without can make a true Christian. If the sweet sacrifice of Jesus is to avail for us it must be wrought in us; the Father must communicate, or beget His Son in us, so that we may apprehend Him in His word of promise. "Then," says Behmen, "I put Him on, in His entire process of justification, in my inward ground; and straightway there begins in me the killing of the wrath of the devil, death, and hell, from the inward power of Christ's death." We become dead to self; but Christ worketh in us when He ariseth within. We are inwardly dead, and He is our life; we live in Him, and not in our self-hood. With our whole desire and will, we "enter into the rose-garden of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ," that the divine breath

may breathe into our spirits, and our life be hid with Christ in God. We must make room in our hearts for the divine love, that Christ may there raise His kingly palace against death and hell, and Himself for ever reign therein. "A true Christian," says Behmen, "does not know himself."

Behmen, like other mystics, recognised the place and power of symbols. In the *Signatura Rerum* he points out that all created things have two characteristics—an inner and invisible essence, and an external and visible form. There is an inward and outward world in which all things live, and the outward always indicates, more or less clearly, the inward. The whole external world is a symbol of the internal and invisible world. It is by the external form of all creatures that their hidden spirit is made known. Everywhere there are gates opening on the Great Mystery. To enter them would be the beginning of our redemption, for it would mark our deliverance from exile, and our return to union with God. Symbols may awake the inward life of the soul and lead to "the Gate of the Great Mystery," for as Behmen says, "Paradise is still in the world, but man is not in paradise, unless he be born

again of God ; in that case he stands therein in his new birth." And when the centre of all being is apprehended, there rises in the heart a joy that surpasseth all other, for then the soul knows that the time is nigh when it shall "regain the flowers of paradise in the new man."

Behmen is careful to preserve the true difference between eternal and transitory creatures, and he never falls into the error of Pantheism. He says that what he relates in succession takes place simultaneously in God, and what he describes separately is one in God. God needs neither method nor medium, and therefore the eternal nature is not His instrument for creating the visible universe. With God thought and realisation take place together, and are in Him identical. It is true that the power of God is in the fruits of the earth, and identifies itself with the generative processes of nature, for "God filleth all things," but neither nature nor the fruits of the earth are God. "I say," says Behmen, "God gives to all life its power, gives power to every creature according to its desire, whether that power be used for good or evil. . . . He communicates His power to all His nature and works, and everything appropriates that power of His

according to its property. One appropriates darkness, another light; the appetite of each demands what is proper to it, and the whole substance is still all of God, whether good or evil. For from Him, and through Him, are all things; and what is not of His love is of His wrath." And, in the *Mysterium Magnum*, Behmen defines the life of man as "nothing less than a spark of the will of God."

Of death, and the future life, Behmen writes: "The soul, when it departs from the body, needeth not to go far; for where the body dies, there is heaven and hell. God is there, and the devil; yea, each in his own kingdom. There also is paradise, and the soul needeth only to enter through the deep door in the centre."

Behmen died in 1626, in his fiftieth year. To such a soul death could have no terrors, and his last words were, "I go to-day to be with my Redeemer and my King in Paradise." The outer life, indeed, remained in this world; but that which the heart had apprehended went with him to where "the open fountain in the heart of Christ Jesus" would "refresh and illumine for

ever." He had committed all to the sweet love of God.

Behmen's life well exemplifies the truth of his own saying—that the greatest power and virtue spring from lowliness and humility. All his days he had lodged in the melancholy inn, and, as he says in his profound treatise on the *Four Complexions*, he wrote for no other purpose than that men might learn how to know themselves. He was not born of art, but of simplicity, and he acknowledged all who loved such mystical knowledge as his brethren in Christ. He knew that our best knowledge here is but in part, and that not until we attain to perfection shall we see what God is, and what He can do. He died in faith, looking for "the time of the lilies." The following is one of Behmen's prayers :

"O Thou great, incomprehensible God, Who fillest all, be Thou indeed my heaven, in which the new creature in Christ Jesus may dwell. Let my spirit be indeed the music and the joy of Thy spirit! Do Thou make music in me . . . and may I make harmony in the divine kingdom of Thy joy, in the great love of God, in the wonders of Thy glory and splendour, in the

company of Thy holy angelic harmonies, and build Thou in me the holy city of Zion, in which we all live as children of Christ in one city, which is Christ in us. In Thee I would lose myself utterly ; do in me what Thou wilt. Amen."

CHAPTER XII

PETER STERRY

PETER STERRY and his writings have fallen into general but undeserved obscurity, although, among those who are versed in mystical theology and thought, his name is honoured and his writings studied still. Sterry's works exercised great influence in their day, and their influence among "the curious and understanding in this kind of writings" is not yet spent.

Despite the fact that his name is by no means familiar to the multitude, Sterry is one of the greatest of the English mystics, and was numbered among the circle of men known as the Cambridge Platonists. Benjamin Whichcote, on hearing of Sterry's death, referred to him as "that greatly enlightened friend of ours, who is now taken from us."

The date of his birth is uncertain, but he was born in Surrey, and educated at Emmanuel

College, Cambridge, which he entered in 1629—three years after Whichcote and one year before Ralph Cudworth. He graduated B.A., in 1633, the same year that Nathaniel Culverwel entered Emmanuel, and was elected a Fellow of his college in 1636—the entrance year of John Smith—proceeding M.A., in the following year. He became a minister of the gospel in London, “and was one of the fourteen divines nominated for the Westminster Assembly by the House of Lords in May 1642.” Seven years later, Sterry was elected as preacher to the Council of State with a stipend of £100 a year (which was afterwards doubled), and apartments at Whitehall. “His duties were to preach on Sundays before Cromwell either at Whitehall or Hampton Court, on every other Thursday morning at the former, and frequently before the Lords and Commons.”¹ He was a friend of Sir Henry Vane the younger, and was deeply attached to Cromwell.

Sterry took no part in the ecclesiastical polemics of his time, though he was vehemently opposed to the “constitutions, methods and discipline” of Presbyterianism, and was a sup-

¹ Article in *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, by Miss C. Fell Smith.

porter of no religious communion that "laboured to hedge in the wind, and to bind up the sweet influences of the Spirit." A man of cultivated mind and artistic instincts, with a feeling for literature and painting, after the death of Cromwell he continued to reside in London, taking pupils, preaching and writing until his death after a lingering sickness, in 1672. When asked on his death-bed, "how his mind stood," it is recorded that "he attested by his last words, with much composure, that it then pleased God also to give him full assurance of those truths he had taught others."

In addition to various sermons, Sterry's published works consist of *The Spirit Convincing of Sin*, London, 1645; *Discourse of the Freedom of the Will*, London, 1675—the preface to which, one writer has said "will bear a comparison with Cudworth's famous sermon on the same subject"; *The Rise, Race and Royalty of the Kingdom of God in the Soul of Man* (with preface by Cromwell's chaplain, Jeremiah White), London, 1683; and *The Appearance of God to Man in the Gospel and the Gospel Change*, London, 1710. This latter contained an *Explication of the Trinity*, and a *Short Catechism*. In 1785 there was

published *Prayers selected from Thomas à Kempis, Everard, Law, and (chiefly) Peter Sterry*.

As a prose writer, Sterry has unusual distinction of style, and it has been affirmed that some of his prose is "worthy of comparison with Milton's." But all his works, which are indeed splendid specimens of the literary efflorescence of Christian mysticism, proclaim him to be a follower of the inward light and a pilgrim along "the interior way." It is certainly not to be wondered at that "he was characterised by Sir Benjamin Rudyard and others as mystical and obscure." On the other hand, it is recorded that on one occasion when Whichcote and Sterry were discussing together intricate theological questions, after Sterry had displayed such extraordinary grasp and knowledge of the wide issues involved, Whichcote rising from his seat, delivered himself thus: "Peter, thou hast overcome me, thou art all pure intellect." As one careful student of his writings observed, Sterry "soared into the pure empyrean of theology with unfailing pinions"; and as another remarks, it is indeed "strange that the tinsel of the English mystics should have been given to the world, and the 'fine gold' of the greatest of them all suppressed."

The mystic or evangelical life is, according to Sterry's teaching, a life in which man ministers unto God, offering up himself unto God "as a perpetual sacrifice in a flame of love," and receiving from Him divine manifestations and communications according to the divine good pleasure, "and all this with an open contemplation of Him, and an assured complacency in Him."

He describes it thus: "When the soul is taught by her experience and her God, that the secret delights of the natural image are for a repast only, not a repose, that in the strength of these as Elijah's food, brought by angels, she is to travel through a wilderness—the ruins of nature with all its principles and images—till she comes to the Mount of God, then she takes up a resolution to stay no longer in this field of swine with the swine, but to make haste to her Father's House, where every servant hath bread enough—each fleshly form is filled with substantial glory. When God hath secretly instructed the soul thus to resolve, He, as a tender-hearted Father, meets her in the beginning of these resolutions, falls upon her neck and kisseth her. God shows Himself in the soul, gives her sweet

testimonies of His love, carries her farther off from the outward image, carries her through the most retired principles of nature beyond and above them, into this spiritual principle and state which is the Spirit of Christ, where God and the creature are united, where the spirit is as water, the flesh as a flourishing earth standing in that water and out of it—being continually fed, continually made fruitful and beautiful by it."

God, Sterry affirms, is the ground of every natural being, and the treasury of all spiritual beings. He is an infinite sweetness, which is both fountain and sea in one—a fountain sending forth many streams, many sons; a sea drawing all into its bosom again by a natural course. Man has come from that boundless deep, and his most urgent need is to discover the way of returning. Sterry adjures us to allow nothing to keep us at a distance from God; for where, he asks, can we be so well as in the bosom of Him who loves us? Thus the mystic's quest is a right discovery of God in order that he may attain to "the life of glory in which all things lived to God, before they lived to themselves in the flesh." The fleshly state Sterry describes

as the true Sodom in which our Lord was crucified—the city of Darkness in which the Eternal Light is put to open shame and torture, till it gives up its Spirit to God. The end of the quest is not reached “till all things be an infiniteness of Divine Appearances, a fulness of Divine Images flowing forth from God, and playing in the Bosom of God,” and the soul “see itself again in God.” Sterry teaches that the soul with all its capacity is natural, and that whatever we can see, feel, declare in, or from our souls, of the enjoyment of God, is but the shadow of the true enjoyment because it hath nature for its seat, if not for its root. Our vocation is to retire beyond nature into the spiritual image of things, to enter into the secrets and depths of the spiritual man. The pity of it is that too often “we set the feet of our fleshly affections upon the life and beauty of our spiritual man,” which is “the undefiled image of God in ourselves, of ourselves in God.”

Except a man be born from above he cannot enter the Divine kingdom—this is the affirmation of all Christian mystics. Sterry says that our Lord gave His disciples “a full description of the Christian Mystery”—of the New Birth—in

the following words: “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.” Thus the mystic, or spiritual man, is born of God, “having the Divine nature, the very root and seed of the Godhead,” within him. He is without cloud or spot, “because the seed of Divinity, which is an Eternal Generation, is ever growing up” within him. Sterry likens the mystical process in the soul to the action of seminal powers in the ground, and says that “the Godhead, by the Gospel, opens itself within the natural man, and brings forth into light the spiritual, the immortal man to the natural.” Sterry calls our life in nature a sleep, and the raising of the soul into Christ is the awakening of it. The soul must pass from the natural life, which is either one of darkness or of dreams into the life which is life indeed.

To assist our conversion, we do well to consider these four questions:

(1) What are we? By descending into our own being, and entering into “the secretest retirement” of our own spirit, we shall discover that we are not our own original, but that there is “some eternal thing” above our reach, past

our understanding, which fashions us, and carries us on in its own image. Whereupon, Sterry bids us: "Look upward then, and say, O Thou hidden and supreme Substance! which hast cast me as thy shadow upon this earth, comprehend me. O Thou supreme Pattern! which hast sent me forth to pass through this world in Thy Image, guide me."

(2) Where are we? We are in a world of images, and our business is to pass through this world as through "a throng of apparitions," we ourselves being numbered among the rest. We are urged to ascend with these till they bring us to their first fountain, where we and they together shall drink and be "wrapt up into an Immortal Fulness."

(3) Whence came we? Sterry answers that we came forth into this world from an immutable Substance, from an eternal Original, and we shall never have rest till we return thither again. "Happy is that soul," says Sterry, "that after all her weary steps through the world to seek content, now tired, thinks of returning to her Father, her first Husband, and breathes forth such sighs as these towards Him: O my God! Thy Fulness is the womb out of which I was brought forth

into this world ; Thy sweetness is the Bosom in which I must eternally rest. How long shall I linger here? O when shall I once leave this world, and come again to Thee?"

(4) How came we hither? We came hither "through a darkness." Sterry writes: "We know not where we were, when God laid the foundations of the earth ; or what we were before that, when all our bones were first written by God in His book ; when first those Eternal Forms which were to frame and sustain every shape or state, into which we should pass, were brought forth in the Divine Wisdom." "Darkness is the bound between God and the creature, through which all things pass out of one into the other." Therefore, we are to "imagine this life as an island, surrounded with a sea of darkness, beyond which lies the main land of Eternity. That man is blessed who can "raise himself to such a pitch as to look off this island, beyond that darkness, to the utmost bound of things." "What shall trouble him, on this twig of life, on which he is like a bird but now alighted from a far region from whence again he shall immediately take his flight?"

The soul that has well pondered these four

questions will recognise that life on earth "is a mixt state of comforts and crosses," and that the one thing needful is to experience the New Birth which will open up to the soul vistas of visions and revelations until it come to "Mount Zion, on which is the great assembly of the First-born."

At the season of the New Birth, says Sterry, "God discovers Himself in the soul as a glorious ground, out of which thy life and thy Jesus spring up together by degrees, like twin-lilies—roses from the same stalk or root, which is Christ." When the set time is come, nothing can withstand that rising, for Jesus Christ and the soul are together born anew from the womb of Eternal Love where they lay hid. "They now come up together in one Spirit into one spiritual life and heavenly image, in which Paradise also comes up new and fresh together with them." In the moment of Regeneration or Conversion, the divine nature is new-born in the soul ; or stated otherwise, the soul is new-born into the divine nature, and "comes forth with a new and divine being into a new and divine world."

Speaking of the New Birth, Sterry says :

“When the Father openeth Himself as a Fountain of Divine Love in your spirits ; when the Lord Jesus ariseth up and appeareth to you as the Birth and Image of Divine Love within this Fountain ; when your selves appear in Him one Love-Birth in this Fountain of Love together with Him ; then may you rejoice and say : ‘ Now I live ; now I am new-born from the Love-spring on high, in the highest glory.’ You that have the mystery of this Divine Birth revealed in you, who see the garden of Love flourishing in the midst of the Fountain of Love within you, retire into this Fountain, into the Garden in the Fountain, the Lord Jesus in the Bosom of the Father.”

This is the rise to the kingdom of God in the soul of man, and “the first motion in religion, the winding of the soul about the utmost point of the creature, and turning in towards God again” ; or, otherwise expressed, “the touching of the soul with God.”

By Sterry, the mystic or spiritual Christian is regarded as one who possesses the immediate and powerful breathings of the Spirit of Christ Jesus within him, and his teaching on the Person and office of Christ—his evangelical representation—is pronounced. As might be expected, he

lays great stress on the doctrine of the Indwelling Christ. The appearances of God in nature were but candle-lights, dim and flickering, but in the Gospel the Divine manifestation is an Eternal Brightness—"one entire light, God shining forth by His Son," God in Christ "appears as One, comprehending the creature in Himself, clothing Himself with the creature," thus taking away the distance and division. He "finds a distance, but makes an unity." The Mediator breaks not the unity, because He is one with both. God in giving us His Son Jesus "gives us all that He is, all that He doth, all that He brings forth, His possessions, treasures, joys, glories, Himself."

Moreover, while the Gospel "is the unveiling of the Face of Christ," it is also the unveiling "of our true face," for the spiritual man—the man of life and glory—is already complete, already ours, "only it is hid above in God." But it is one person with us; it is our truest self. The man therefore who saves the life of his natural flesh and abides in it, loses the life of his spiritual flesh till it disappears from him; but he who allows the outward and earthly life to perish preserves the heavenly life in himself.

“The spiritual man and Jesus Christ are both one spirit, have both one face.” So close is the spiritual marriage which the Lord makes between Himself and the soul that we do not see Jesus aright if we see not ourself in Him ; while we see not ourself aright unless we see our Saviour in ourself ; for “Christ maketh a Christian one mystical person with Himself.” And the means by which the Lord makes the saint one Image with Himself are, according to Sterry, four : Manifestation, Propagation, Translation, and Combination or Marriage. Sterry expresses the intimacy existing between the soul and Christ by saying that the mystic carries about with him, in the earthen vessel of his flesh, an unspeakable treasure. He has Christ and God sojourning with him “under the same roof of this tabernacle ; for God is in Christ, Christ is the spiritual man ; the spiritual man lives in the natural ; God is one with Christ ; Christ and the spiritual man are one spirit.” Thus the mystic maintains a perpetual fellowship with his Saviour, since He is in him as one with him. “It is a single life ; it is an association of lives ; it is the life of two in one ; of a saint and his Saviour, it is a marriage of lives and spirits.”

The mystic fellowship of the soul with Christ is well expressed in the following words: "If the Lord Jesus be in thee, let thy life be thy Saviour's, and not thine; let the life which thou livest be by the faith of the Son of God; by an Union or Incorporation with Him. Let thy life be a resignation of thyself to thy Saviour, a derivation of His life into thee. He hath loved thee above all things; let Him possess thee entirely. Be thou His, and not another's—not thine together with His. He hath given Himself in exchange for thee, to be in thee, instead of thee. Let Him alone form and act thee."

Sterry warns, too, with emphatic words, against the pretending to a union which does not exist: "If we say that Jesus Christ the Light of God dwells in us, and yet delight not in the ways of His Spirit which are life, beauty, pleasantness, liberty, but are found in the paths of flesh and walks of sensuality, we are not united to Him who is Truth, but have our hearts still lying in the bosom of him who is the father of lies."

Sterry bids us search out "the secrets of the Spirit of Christ in our soul. Thou hast a Master in thy own breast. None teaches like

Him. Propound thy darkness, thy desires, to the spirit of the Lord Jesus in thine own soul; there hearken to the private whispers; there receive the inward answers, replies, representations of that Spirit which will pour forth itself into a stream of sweet and deep apprehensions, in a flood of powerful and glorious manifestations, if thou wait upon it. It will give thee life, light and language in heavenly things." The Indwelling Christ is the supreme Illuminator, and the mystic is drawn to Christ by the cords of a conquering love. "O Jesus! cast Thou but one glimpse of Thyself into our souls, and we shall run from all things after Thee, fly beyond all things towards Thee. How dark and cold are these shadows to him that hath seen the Light of Beauty in Thy Person, and felt the warm life of love in Thine embraces!"

God having revealed Himself in the soul, draws the soul farther away from the outward image, beyond and above the most retired principles of nature into the spiritual principle and state which is the Spirit of Christ, and where God and the creature are united. The spiritual state of things when made perfect becomes the divine state of things in God.

Sterry describes the union of the soul with God in the following words: "The soul having been awhile taught in the bosom of Christ, begins to grow up to a fuller sense of God, in a more naked, abstracted, absolute, and comprehensive manner. Now she begins to put off all that ever she put on, that God may be her only clothing. She begins to think it not enough to live and walk in the spirit of God—except she be one Spirit with Christ and God. She perceives some dark glimpse of that which is meant, to know as we are known—that is, *in patriâ*, at home in God, comprehensively, by being comprehended in God, and so comprehending Him again." The desire of the mystic is to dwell for ever in the naked embraces of the Eternal Spirit of Life and Beauty, to go from hence for ever, but departing, to be for ever with the Lord.

Sterry knows, however, that the heavenly image in the soul that has been reborn is subject to various clouds and storms while in the body, for it is always in conjunction with the fleshly image. This seldom suffers it to shine forth clearly and purely; often, indeed, it is so clouded and captivated that it can send

forth neither sweet beam nor spark to enlighten the soul "to any sensible discovery of it, or warm thee with any sensible comfort in it." The soul has to pass through "a night of eternal darkness upon all earthly contents," ere it is brought "out of the light of this world into the Day of Christ." But by resignation, consecration and prayer the mystic wins his way. He dwells in the Spirit, as a priest in the Temple, in purity, spirituality, with a holy reverence and a sacred awe. He offers up perpetually his life as a sacrifice to the life of Christ. This is his constant prayer: "Come thou north wind, thou living power of my Saviour's death, blow upon me; come, thou south wind, thou glorious power of my Saviour's Resurrection, breathe upon me."

INDEX

Abandonment, 157
 Achievement, Spiritual, 130
 Aristotle, 15
Ascent of Mount Carmel, The,
 123
Aurora, The, 134

Behmen, Jacob, 132-45; his
 writings, 132; spiritual in-
 sight and genius of, 133;
 influenced by Paracelsus,
 133; St. Martin's opinion
 of, 133; Wesley's char-
 acterisation of Behmen's
 Works, 133; Henry More
 on, 133; his spiritual and
 mental indebtedness, 134;
 his first vision, 134; his
 second vision, 134, 135;
The Aurora, 134; Dr.
 Whyte on, 136; William
 Law on, 136; on the New
 Birth, 137, 139; *The*
Threefold life of man, 137;
 on the will, 137, 138; on
 abiding in Christ, 139;
 on the indwelling of Christ,
 139; on the inward power
 of Christ's death, 140; on
 symbolism, 141; *Signa-*
tura Rerum, 141; on God
 filling all things, 142; on
 the deep door, 143; on

death and the future life,
 143; *The Four Complex-*
ions, 144; a prayer of,
 144, 145

Benson, A. C., quoted, 7

Bigg, Dr., quoted, 5, 8; on
 Clement, 26, 39

Birth of the Son of God in
 the soul, 61: see Re-
 generation

Blake, William, 6

Christianity, Esoteric, 7

Clement of Alexandria, 26-40;
 his writings, 26; his aim,
 27; on initiation, 27, 28;
 on perfection, 27, 35; on
 knowledge, 28, 31-3, 36;
 on man's regeneration, 28;
 on Christ, 28; on the
 lesser and the great mys-
 teries, 28, 30; on the
 soul's first nourishment,
 29; on full insight, 29;
 on contemplation, 29; on
 divine science, 29; on the
 perfection of man, 29, 33;
 on mysteries, 29; on the
 two forms of truth, 30;
 on the concealed reality,
 30; on illumination, 30;
 on interpretation, 30; on
 the historical facts of Chris-

- tianity, 30; on true wisdom, 31; on the veil of ignorance, 31; on the true meaning of the Scriptures, 31; on God's workmanship, 32; on the twofold character of the Christian life, 32; on the soul's surrender, 33; on "deification," 33, 34; on union with the Holy Spirit, 34; on the image of God, 34; on the mystic's life, 34, 35; on the mystic translation and rest, 35, 39; on the contemplation of God, 35; familiar with the language of the Greek mysteries, 35; on purification, 35, 36, 38; on the grace of illumination, 37; on the source of all true knowledge, 37; on the interpretation of Scripture, 38; on love, 38, 39; a prayer of, 40
- Correspondences, 4, 56
- Crashaw, on St. Teresa, 120, 121
- Cromwell, 147
- Cudworth, Ralph, 147
- Culverwel, Nathaniel, 147
- Cunninghame Graham, Mrs., on St. Teresa, 117
- "Cups of bitterness," 98
- Darkness, The lonely, 73
- Dereliction, 93
- Detachment, 84, 85, 115, 123, 124
- "Divine Abyss," The, 105
- Dionysius the Areopagite, 41-52; his date and nationality unknown, 41; his aim, 41; Platonic elements in his teaching, 41; his view of Christianity, 42; his conception of God, 42; his "world-view," a modification of the Neo-Platonic theory of emanation, 42; on the world as an allegory, 42; on God as the Absolute, 43; on the "supra-national unity," 43; on the Good and the Beautiful as manifestations of God, 43; on the knowledge of God, 44; on rites and symbols, 44, 49; on perfection, 44; on "deification," 44; not a pantheist, 44; on the immanence and transcendence of God, 45; on the mystical *via negativa* and the *via affirmativa*, 45; on unity in diversity, 45; on mystic ignorance, 46; on the "divine dark," 46, 47; his influence on the mediæval mystics, 47, 94; on union with God, 47, 51, 52; on denuding the mind, 47; on tradition and Scripture, 49; on the Divine Hierophant, 50; on Christ

- as the Light-Bearer and Light-Bringer, 51; on the three stages of the mystical ladder, 51
- Dorner, criticism of Dionysius, 50; criticism of Suso, 93
- Dying to live, 57
- Eckhart, Master, 53-66; on the knowledge of God, 54, 55; the apprehension of God, 55; on the creation as an expression of the divine life, 56; on the soul's attainment, 56; on "correspondences," 56; on God's desire for man, 56; on the divine disclosure, 56, 57; on dying to self, 57; on "abandonment," 57; on union, 57; on "the voice of God," 58; on the soul's "return," 58; on the soul and God, 57, 58; on God's work in the soul, 59; on "the little spark," 60; on regeneration, 60; on the birth of Christ in the soul, 61; on man's will and God's will, 61, 62; on the work of divine grace, 62; on sin, 63, 64; on prayer, 64, 65; practical mysticism of, 65; a prayer of, 66
- Ecstasy, 114
- Eternal wisdom, The Book of the, 84
- Eternity, Idea of, 8; the main-land of, 155
- Ewald, on the true mystic, 65
- Four Complexions, The*, 144
- "Friends of God," 95
- Hierotheus 41,
- Huysmans, M., on St. Teresa, 116
- Ignorance, Mystic, 73, 74
- Illumination, 12
- Imitatio Christi*, 103
- Incarnation, The, 20
- Indwelling of Christ, The, 139, 158
- Inge, Dr., on the doctrine of "deification," 33; quoted, 54; on Suso's autobiography, 82; on St. Teresa, 109; on St. John of the Cross, 122
- Inner life, Summit of, 71
- "Inner light," Doctrine of the, 20
- Interior Castle, The*, 115
- Interior life, The, 79
- Interior spirits, The choice of, 77
- Interior Translation, The, 129, 130
- Interior Way, 12
- John, St., Gospel according to, 20-25; on the Incarnation, 20; on the creation, 21; his use of symbols,

- 21; on the supreme revelation, 21; on the New Birth, 21; teaching on purification, 22; on the soul's development, 22; on the Living Bread, 22; on the soul's participation in Christianity, 22; on the appropriation of a sacrificial life, 23; on the mystic idea of unity, 23; on the abiding union, 23; doctrine of the Spirit, 23, 24; on Divine knowledge, 23; on the threefold witness, 23; the witness in the heart, 24; the witness of the Spirit, 24; the Spirit and Christ, 24; the Spirit as teacher, 24; on Love, 24, 25
- John of the Cross, St., 122-31; his ascetic austerities, 122; Dr. Inge on, 122; Vaughan on, 122, 123; *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 123; *The Obscure Night of the Soul*, 123; on detachment, 123, 124; on the surrender of finite things, 124; on the night of the sense, 125; on the right of the spirit, 125; on purgation, 126; mystical theology, 126; the night of the will, 127; the *Song of the Obscure Night*, 128-9; on "The Interior Translation," 129, 130; "the mystical love-gift," 130; on the love of God, 130, 131; a prayer of, 131
- Jowett, Benjamin, quoted, 4
- Lasson, quoted, 4
- Law, William, on Behmen, 136
- Lewis, David, quoted, 128
- Luther, on Tauler's *Sermons*, 101
- Maeterlinck, on Ruysbroeck, 67
- More, Henry, on Behmen, 133
- Mysteries, The Greek, 15
- Mysterium Magnum*, 77, 143
- Mystery, 2
- Mystical Love-Gift, The, 130
- Wisdom, 127
- View of life, 5
- Prayer, 100
- Mysticism, definition of, 2; criticisms of, 3, 53; an axiom of, 5; content of, 8; history of, 13; Christian, 6; charter of, 20
- Mystics, 1, 3, 10; secret of the, 2; belief of the, 4, 38; life of the, 65, 150, 151, 163; progress of, 115; operation of the, 3; spiritual education of, 5; experiences of, 7, 15; the desire of, 11, 13, 152; the path of, 12, 93; use of symbols, 43; language of the, 53
- Neo-Platonism, 41
- Nettleship, R. L., quoted, 4
- Nicholas of Strassburg, 96

Obscure Night of the Soul, The,
123

Ordo spiritualium nuptiarum,
67

Paracelsus, his influence on
Behmen, 133

Passio Christi, 85, 87, 89,
90, 91, 112, 140

Paul, St., 14-20; the prince
of Christian mystics, 14;
his Gospel, 14; his visions
and revelations, 14, 15;
his mysticism, 15; his
union with Christ, 16; on
crucifixion with Christ, 16;
on the Headship of Christ,
17; on the Church as the
Bride of Christ, 17, 18;
on the mystic union, 18;
the Greek mysteries and
St. Paul's language and
imagery, 18; on degrees
of initiation, 18; on en-
lightenment, 18; on con-
ditions of initiation, 18, 19;
his doctrine of the Spirit,
19; on Christ and the
Spirit, 19; on the dis-
cernment of divine truth,
19; on spiritual under-
standing, 20

Perfection, Spiritual, 86

Plato, 13

Proclus, 41

Purgation, 12, 126

Regeneration, 60, 61, 137,
139, 152, 153, 156, 157

Resignation, 87

Ritchie, Professor, quoted, 53

Rudyard, Sir Benjamin, 149

Ruysbroeck, 67-80; Maeter-
linck on, 67; on love and
rest, 69; on the stages
of the inward way, 69-74;
on love, 70; on the active
life, 70; on the internal
life, 70, 71; on illumina-
tion or supernatural vision,
71; on interior love, 71;
on the contemplative life,
72, 73; on "the lonely
darkness," 73; the stage
of ignorance, 73, 74; on
possessing God, 74; on
the life of love, 75; on
the Bridegroom's coming,
75; on union with God,
76; pantheism in, 76; on
"the dark silence," 77;
on secret joys, 77; on the
endurance of sufferings, 77,
78; on the Incarnate Son,
78; His mysticism practical
79; on the interior life, 79

Saint-Martin, quoted, 56, 61,
70; on Behmen, 133

Scala perfectionis, 10

Schwenkfeld, 134

Self-abandonment, 86, 105,
106

Signatura Rerum, 141

Smith, John, 147

Song of the Obscure Night,
The, 128, 129

"Spark," the little, 60

Spiritual man, *The*, 158, 159

- Spiritual marriage, The, 159
 — principle, The, 151
- Sterry, Peter, 146-63;
 Whichcote and, 146, 147,
 149; at Emmanuel Col-
 lege, Cambridge, 147; as
 Preacher to the Council of
 State, 147; writings of,
 148; his prose, 149; on
 the mystic life, 150, 151;
 on the spiritual principle,
 151; on the end of the
 Quest, 152; on the New
 Birth, 152, 153, 156, 157;
 on the soul's exile, 154;
 on "the mainland of
 eternity," 155; on the
 Indwelling Christ, 158; on
 the spiritual man, 158,
 159; on the spiritual mar-
 riage, 159; on union with
 Christ, 160, 161; union
 with God, 162; on the
 mystic life, 163
- Suso, 81-94; his asceticism,
 81; his visions and ecs-
 tasies, 81-3; his auto-
 biography, 82; the Book
 of the Eternal Wisdom, 84;
 on detachment, 84, 85; on
 the Passion of Christ, 85,
 87, 89, 90, 91; on spiritual
 perfection, 86; on self-
 abandonment, 86; the
 basis of his mystical teach-
 ing, 86; on resignation, 87;
 on cross-bearing, 87; on
 the secrets of God, 88;
 on the Bridegroom of the
 soul, 92; on dereliction,
 93; influence of Dionysius
 on, 94
- Swinburne, A. C., quoted, 12
- Symbol, Use of, 10, 11
- Symbolism, 141; Christian,
 6; universal, 6
- Tauler, 95-107; influenced
 by earlier mystics, 95;
 influence of Eckhart upon,
 96; influence of Nicholas
 of Strassburg upon, 96;
 the preaching of, 96; on
 the indwelling of God, 97;
 on "an exceeding bitter
 myrrh," 98, 99; on the
 work of God in the soul,
 100; on the essence of the
 mystic's prayer, 100; on
 the sinfulness of sin, 100-2;
 on the Cross of Christ's
 humanity, 102; on the
 imitation of Christ, 103; his
 doctrine of self-abandon-
 ment, 105; on the "di-
 vine abyss," 105, 106; on
 "the secret union, 107
- Tennyson, quoted, 136
- Tersteegen, Hymns of*, quoted,
 91
- Teresa, St., 108-21; visions
 and voices, 109, 110; her
 practice of mental prayer,
 110; four degrees of prayer,
 112; the prayer of quiet,
 113; the prayer of union,
 113; the prayer of ecstasy,
 114; on the best prayer,

- 114; *The Interior Castle*, 115; on "detachment," 115; her insight, 116; "a sharp martyrdom," 117; her *Way of Perfection*, 117; on the indwelling of Christ, 118, 119, 120; on supernatural illumination, 129
- Theology, Mystical, 126
- Threefold life of man, The*, 137
- Union, The Mystery of, 6; The fact of, 12; the Mystical, 15, 47, 57, 58, 60, 75-7, 106, 107, 162
- Union with Christ, 160, 161
- Unity, The Idea of, 8, 23
- Vane, Sir Henry, 147
- Vaughan, R. A., on Dionysius, 41; on Ruysbroeck, 79; on Tauler, 105; on St. John of the Cross, 122, 123
- Vision, Supernatural, 71
- Visions and revelations, 79, 81-3, 127; voices and, 109, 110
- Waite, A. E., quoted, 3, 11, 48, 74, 104, 126
- Way of Perfection, The*, 117
- Weigel, 134
- Wesley, John, on Behmen, 133
- Whichcote, Benjamin, on Sterry, 146, 147, 149
- White, Jeremiah, 148
- Whittier, J. G., quoted, 105
- Whyte, Dr., on St. Teresa, 108, 110; on Behmen, 136

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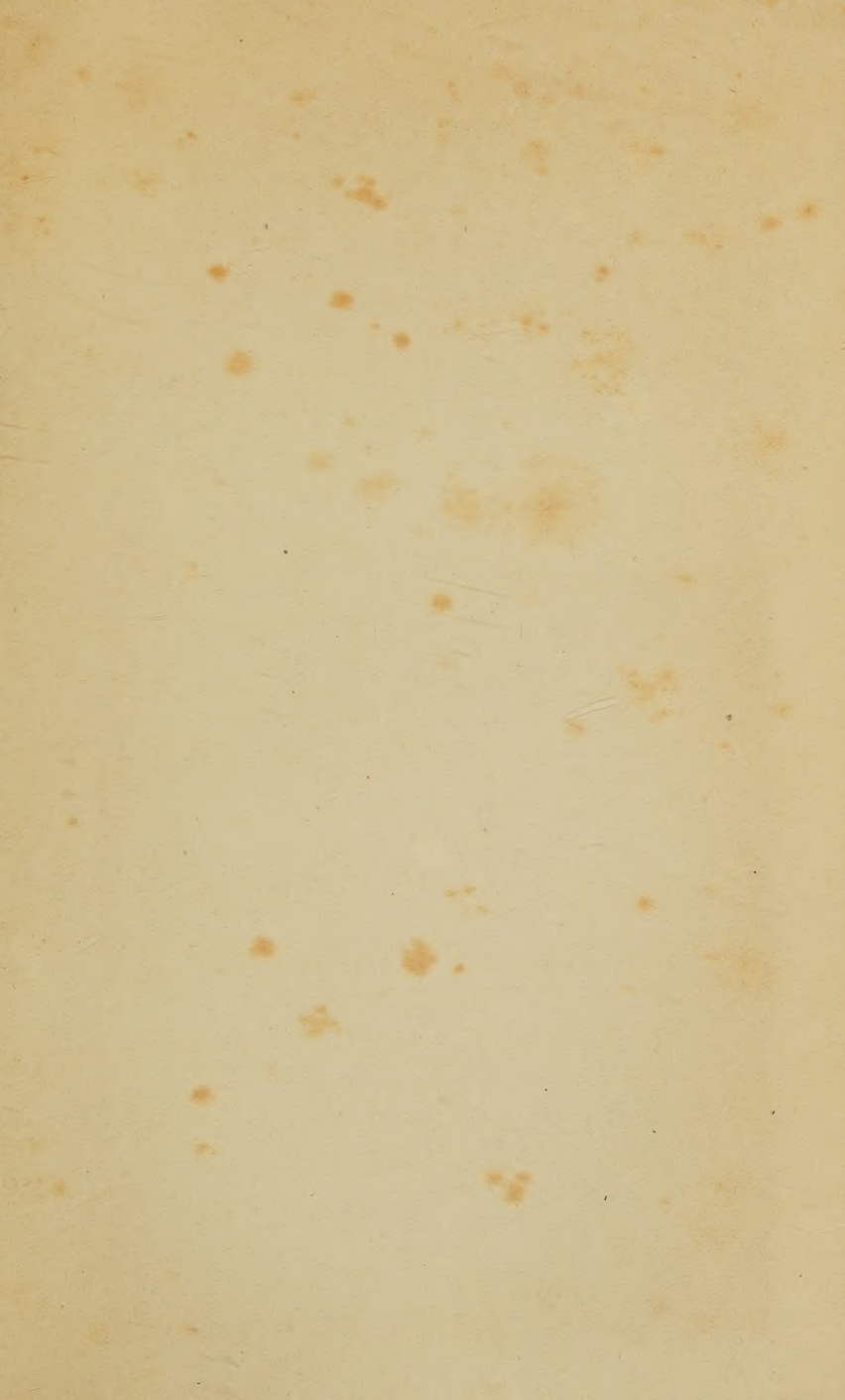
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